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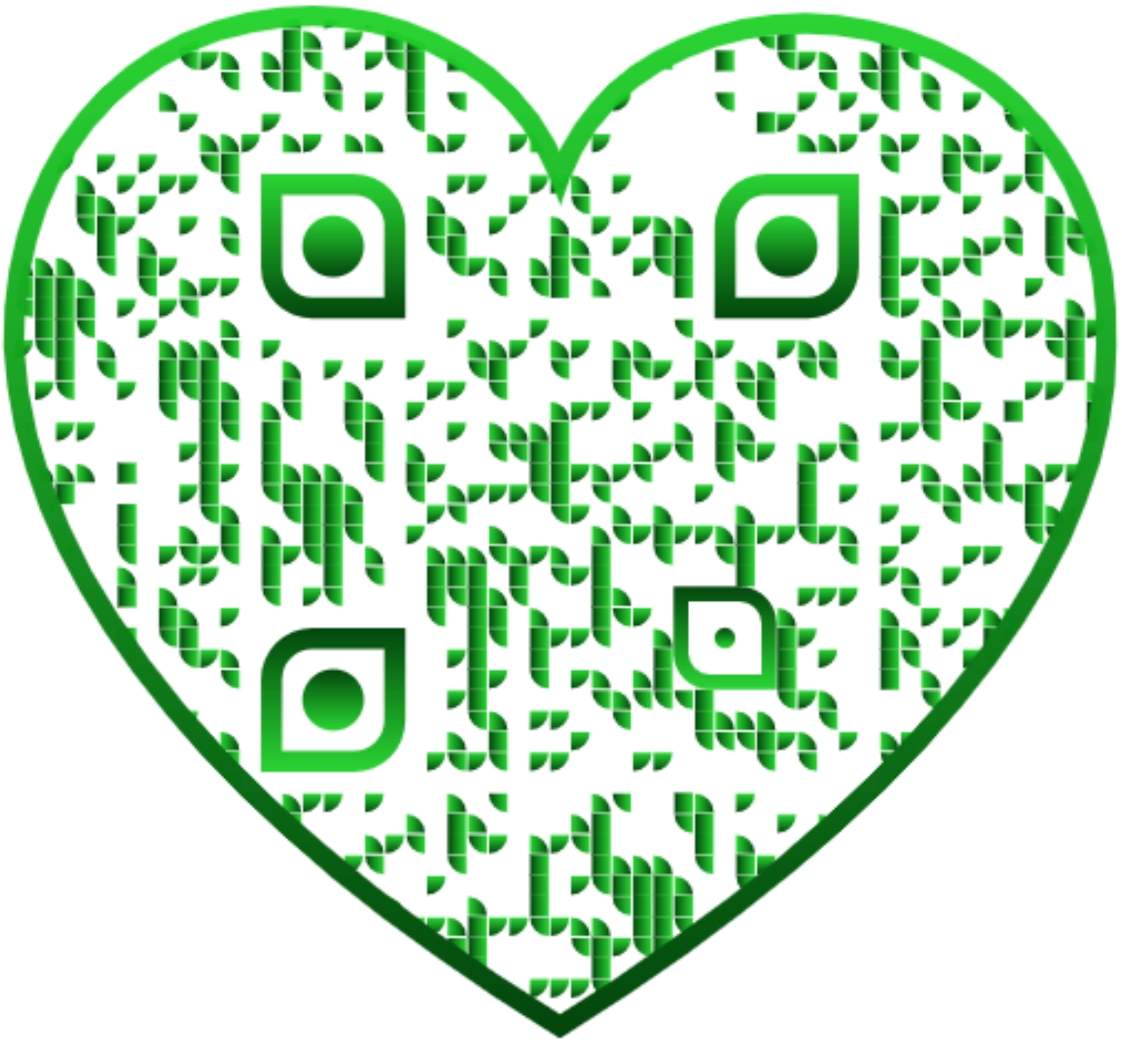

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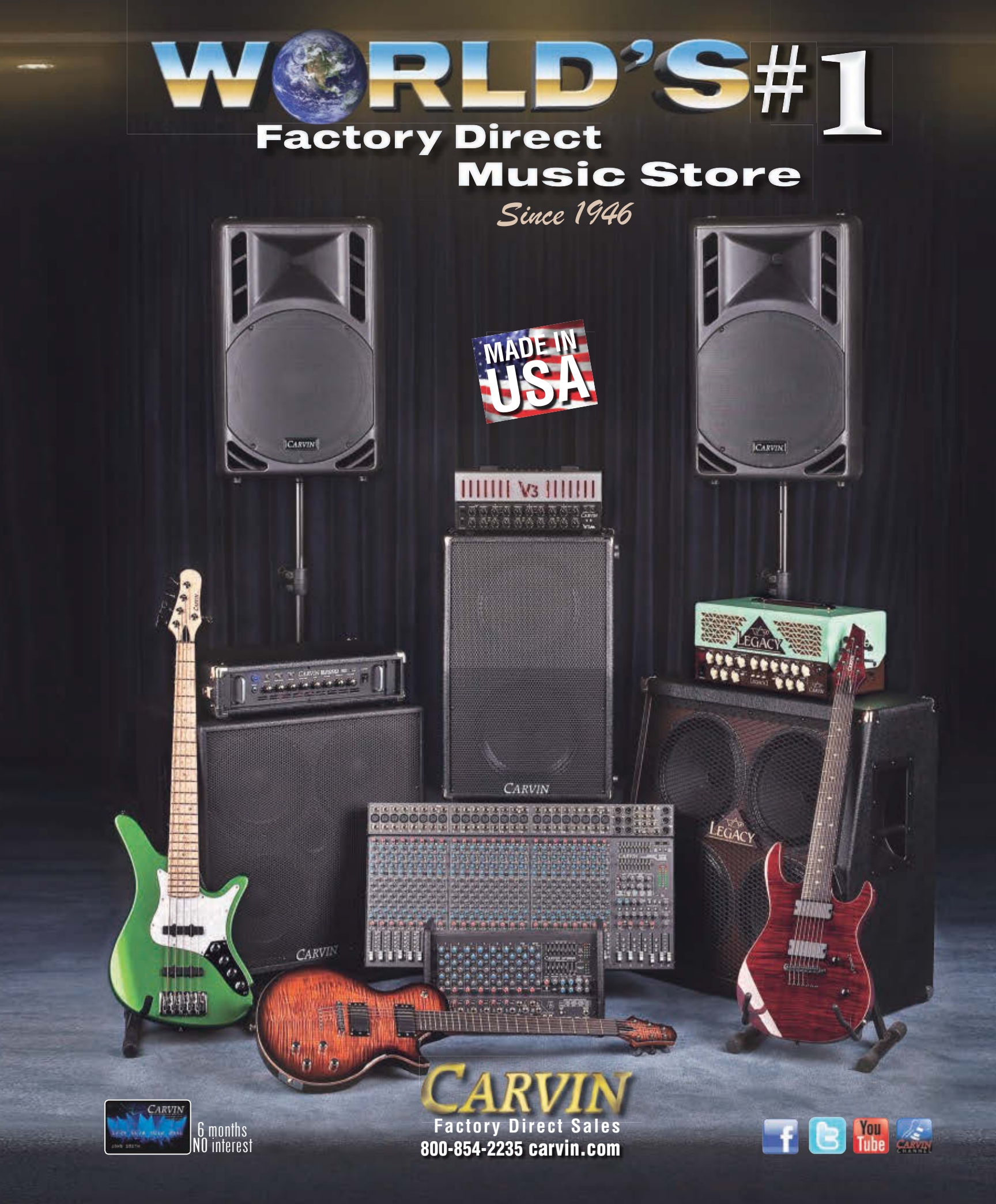
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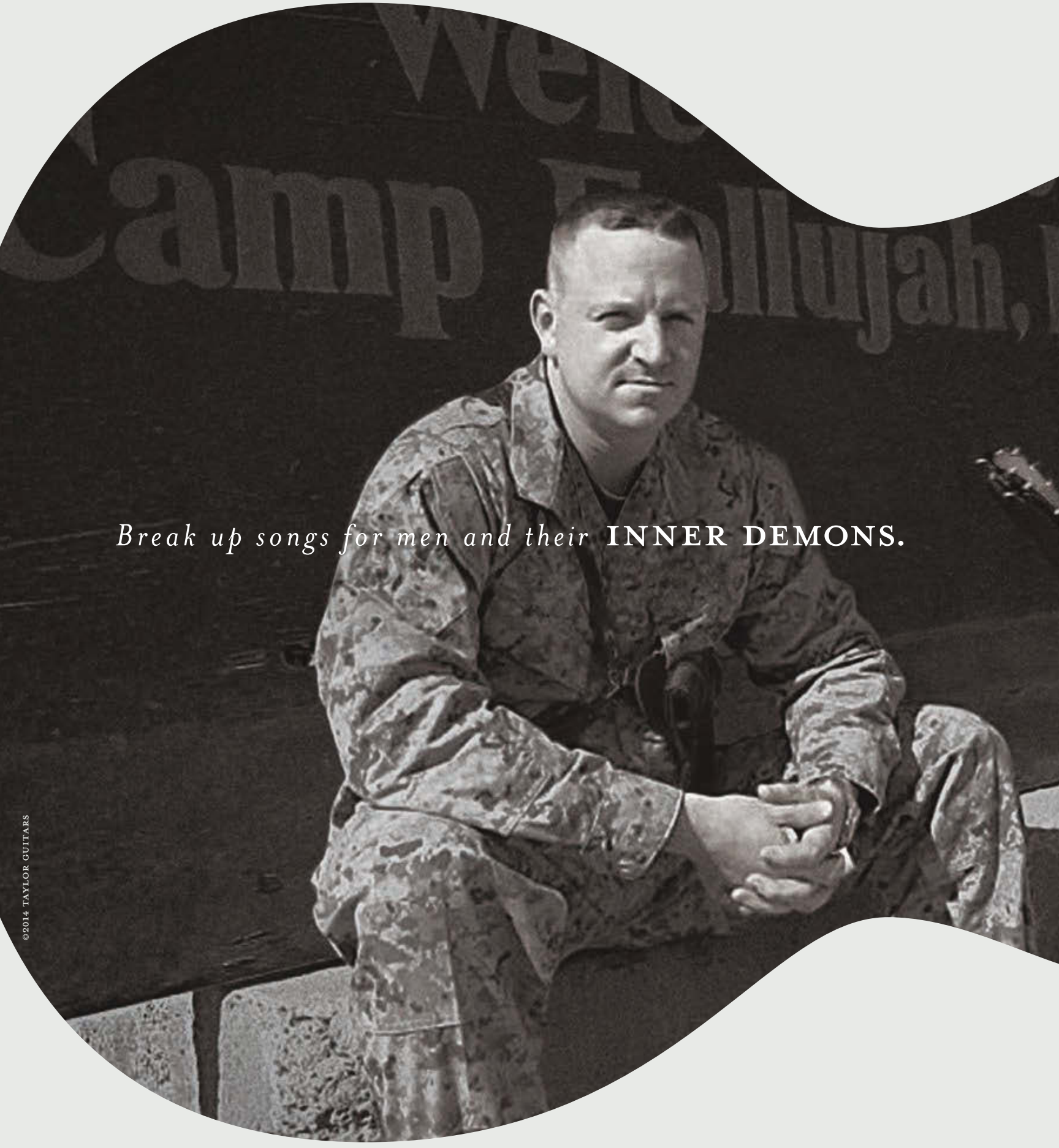

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MIKE, A COMBAT-SEASONED MARINE, HAD ALWAYS BEEN BRAVE. BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL HE RETURNED HOME FROM HIS TOUR IN IRAQ, THAT HE REVEALED JUST HOW FEARLESS HE REALLY WAS. BECAUSE AS SOON AS MIKE STEPPED BACK ONTO U.S. SOIL, HE STEPPED OUT ONTO A HUGE LIMB BY WRITING AND PERFORMING SONGS THAT UNEARTHED THE KIND OF SUBJECT MATTER MOST RETURNING SERVICE MEN AND WOMEN NEVER WANT TO TALK ABOUT—REOPENING WOUNDS IN ORDER TO HEAL THEM. AND THOUGH MIKE REALIZED HE WOULD STIR UP A LOT OF ANGER, DARKNESS AND PAIN, HE ALSO KNEW HE COULD HELP HIS FELLOW SERVICE MEMBERS COPE WITH THEIR DEMONS IN A WAY THAT WAS A LITTLE LESS DAUNTING. THROUGH MUSIC, MIKE REMINDS US THAT WHETHER YOU'RE A GUITAR PLAYER OR A GUITAR BUILDER, THE WORLD NEEDS MORE PEOPLE LIKE HIM. FOR MORE ABOUT MIKE AND OTHER STORIES THAT INSPIRE US, *visit taylorguitars.com*

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The Power of "No."

BY SHAWN HAMMOND

@PG_shawnh

The week of February 16, 2014, brought us yet more horrific reminders of how brutal life can be across the globe. High-definition videos and stills of Ukrainian civilians battling police in streets of fire have streamed to our devices in real time, troubling us with their graphic violence over issues most of us know only trivial details about. We probably know less about as-bad or worse conflicts going on right now in Syria, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Pakistan, and South Sudan, but that doesn't decrease the poignancy of seeing riot-gear-clad regime officers wielding automatic weapons against everyday people lobbing bricks.

We also winced, jaws dropped, as we saw the women of Russian punk collective Pussy Riot whipped by police in Sochi as they attempted to film a video protesting President Vladimir Putin in front of a billboard for the 2014 Winter Olympics.

Between the press of work (including deadline week for this mag) and everyday life, I've snuck glimpses and tried to keep up with news on all this stuff, and when I boil it down, what's really struck me is the power of "No." (Note the importance of the period—its finality.) No, we won't be oppressed. No, we won't be bullied. No, we won't shrink from principle in the face of danger.

Unrest around the world is certainly more complex than our scope here, but I do want to publicly salute the fearless women of Pussy Riot. In the West, we have our urgent issues—everyone everywhere does—but in contrast to other conflicts around the world, at least we can decide whether to speak our mind or mind our own business and still go home safely at night.

Since Pussy Riot's Nadya Tolokonnikova, Masha Alyokhina, and Yekaterina Samutsevich were arrested and imprisoned in early 2012 for their first headline-grabbing anti-Putin performance, I've watched closely as they've gotten well-deserved support from around the world. In solidarity, I donated to efforts, signed online petitions for their release, and even purchased a T-shirt with the "¡No Pasarán!"—"They shall not pass!"— declaration, just like the one Tolokonnikova was wearing when she was arrested.

Samutsevich was released after a few months, but Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina were held till December 2013. But even when the latter two made it safely out of their country and made charmingly witty and astute appearances on programs such as *The Colbert Report*, they refused to settle in and seek asylum. They headed back to their troubled homeland to continue their efforts to thwart a government that pretends to be democratic but leans despotic. Say what you will of their brash music, these ladies are freaking *badass*—both for their guts and their ingenious use of art for progress. They will go down in history. They already have.

What the hell does this have to do with guitar? Lots. Besides being fearless revolutionaries for justice in the same way as revered Western punks, their music is pretty damn rad. (For proof, go to YouTube and watch the new video that they were *trying* to shoot when they were whipped this week: "Pussy Riot - Putin will teach you how to love / Путин научит.") Beyond that, Pussy Riot's fearless attitude is also reminder of the power of "no" in things that are perhaps of smaller consequence, but still of great import. No, I won't ignore my conscience. No, I won't be complacent and self-absorbed. No, I won't take my loved ones for granted. No, I won't solo for 12 minutes straight. No, I won't fetishize gear at the cost of musicality.

Of course, saying "no" usually means nothing unless you also say "hell *yes*" to something else—a course of action to remedy the situation or forestall gridlock or equally bad alternatives. But the pace of life and technology these days makes it so easy to either be distracted from a better path or just go with the flow. That's why I'm grateful for true musical heroes who remind me of the power of "no."

Shawn Hammond
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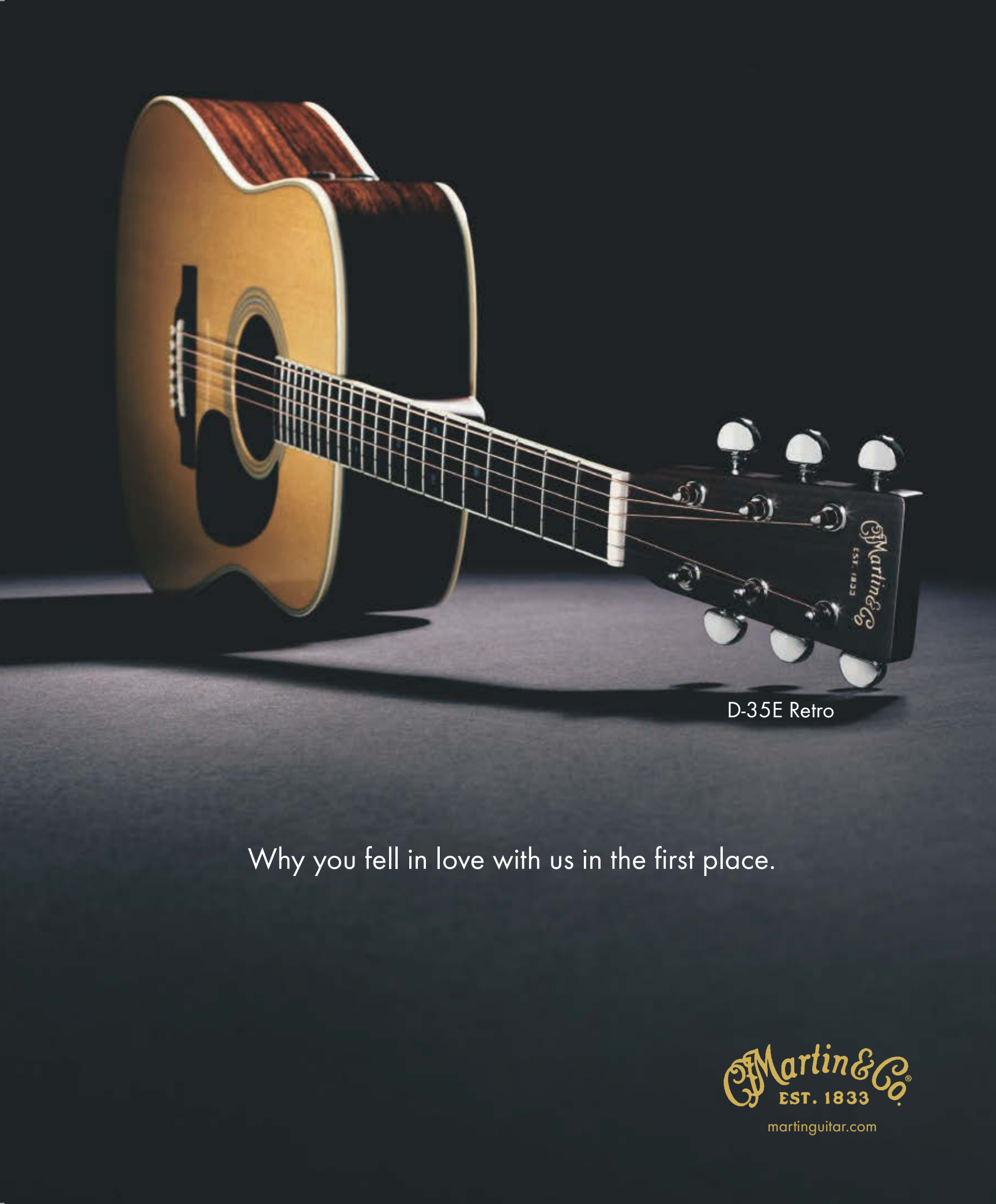
shawn@premierguitar.com

Photo by Igor Mukhin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FEEDBACK LOOP

Reunited

In 1973, The Doobie Brothers were one of the most popular bands in the country, and I was hired to tour as their guitar tech. One fateful night in 1973, Tommy Johnston's favorite guitar, a late '60s Gibson SG with P-90 pickups, took a hard fall backstage after being restrung. The fall was so hard that the headstock snapped off and the neck was badly damaged in multiple places. The guitar was thought to be irreparable and Tommy threw it in the trash. I took it from the trash and stashed it away in the hopes that one day I'd be able to repair it since the guitar meant so much to Tommy.

It wasn't until 1988 that a good friend of mine needed a speaker and traded an old SG for it. It had the right style neck and could work if the guitar could be salvaged. Fast-forward to 1989 and a major earthquake shook the San Francisco Bay Area, further damaging the guitar, which was in my Santa Cruz home. The original pickups were damaged as well, and the guitar was yet again left for another time.

I went out again with The Doobie Brothers in 1992 to earn enough money to open up a guitar repair facility in Campbell, California, in the heart of Silicon Valley, a facility that's still in operation today. Once I returned from the tour, I vowed to get the guitar back together. Building up the shop and making it a profitable business took precedence and the project was yet again put on the back burner until 2010. After months of patient gluing and reworking of the pickups and electronics, the guitar was back together. A few local professionals tested the guitar and determined that it played fine, but it just didn't feel amazing, or play like a great SG should. Determined to get it right, I started over and did a full neck reset on the SG to get it playing better than new. After some more feedback from local pros, the guitar was finally dialed in and ready for Tommy. Amazingly, the finish is still original, despite a multitude of finish cracks that were reglued.

I presented the guitar to a very surprised Tommy Johnston on December 7, 2013. The guitar will remain in Tommy's collection as a cherished memory of a guitar he never expected to see again and an important part of the history of The Doobie Brothers.

—Mark Brown,
Santa Cruz, California

Centaur of the Universe

I bought my Klon in early '96 after watching Bill do his demos at the Dallas Guitar Show. It has so many amazing sounds I never turn it off when I play. It has survived years of gigs on my pedalboard, and I'll never sell it. Great interview!

—Richard Silletto,
via premierguitar.com

Pedal Pusher

Many years ago, I was fortunate enough to meet Mr. Doug Wimbish at the soundcheck for a clinic he was doing for the MI store where I worked. He didn't have an actual board with him, and I watched him line up his current crop of pedals one by one. He saw me watching and said hello. I jokingly said, "If I had that many pedals my band would fire me." He replied, "Then you need a new band, man." While my bass gig at the time didn't require any sort of avant-garde signal processing, Doug's comment has always stuck in the back of my mind as a reminder to never let other people's opinions stifle your creative impulses.

—Scott Harnish,
via premierguitar.com

Keep those comments coming!

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Favorites right there ["Mogwai's Post-Rock Roar," March 2014]. Seeing them for the first time was simply mind expanding in regards to how the aforementioned loud volume enhances the textures they build and compose.

—Andrew J Swegler

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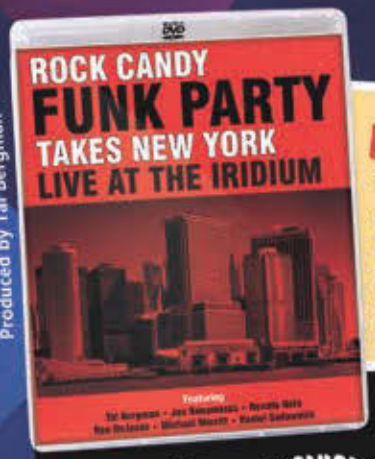

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—John Frusciante, p. 58

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Paul Rhoney Guitars Oceana DuoTone, McPherson Kevin Michael Carbon Fiber travel guitar, Diezel Lil Fokker shot at C.S.P.S. Hall, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

If players from different eras played the exact same notes on these records, would they be any more (or less) funky?

—Steve Cook, On Bass, p. 94

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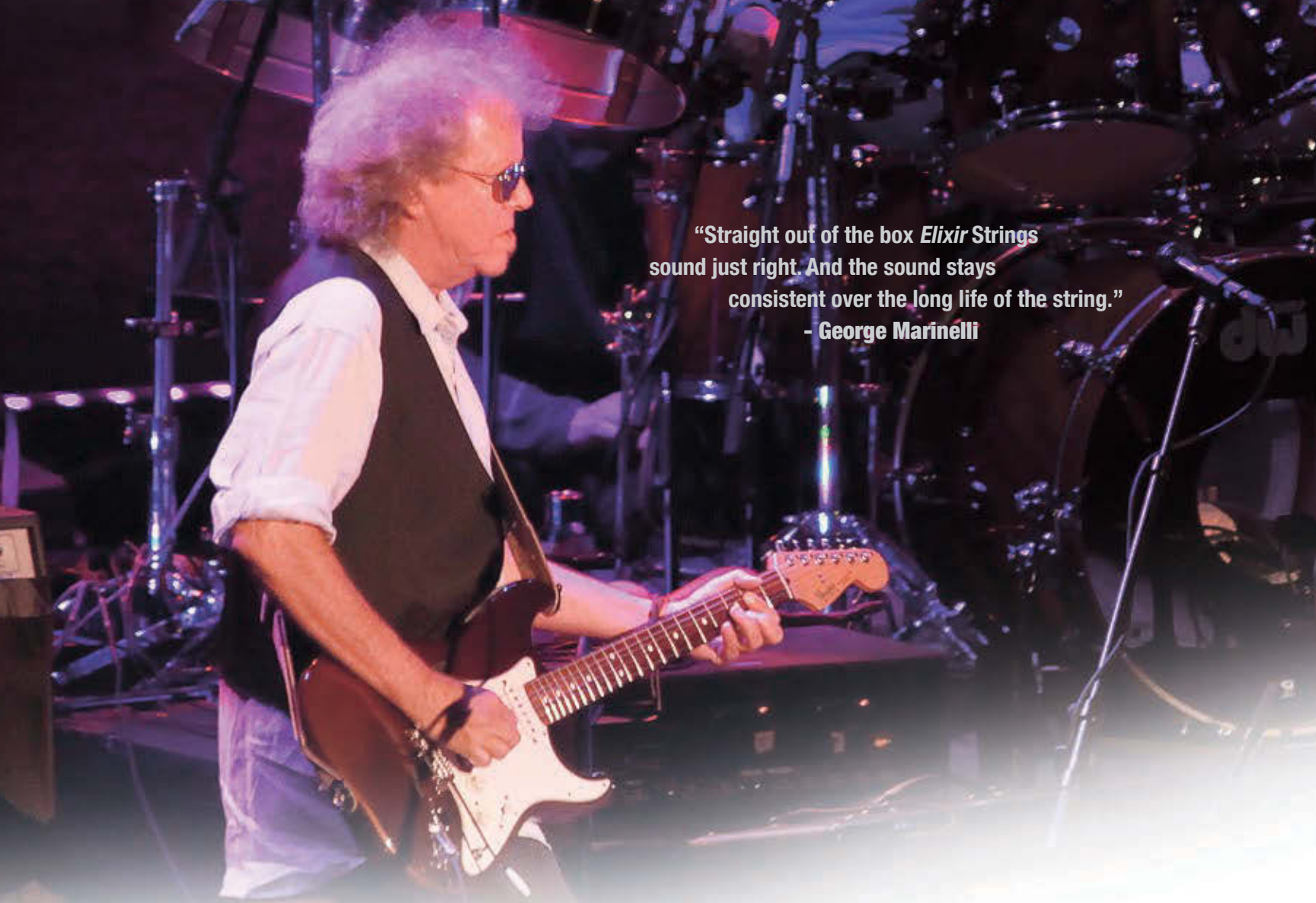
How to Install Standard and Locking Strap Buttons

Photo by Kirk Stauffer



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FEATURED

Two Top Fives

This month we give you special gear commentary from Alter Bridge guitarists **Mark Tremonti** and **Myles Kennedy**. Tremonti, a serious amp nerd who isn't afraid to step away from the boutique side of things and use more affordable (and available) amps in his backline, gives us his Top 5 amps. For a taste, we'll tell you he digs a Fender '65 Twin Reverb Reissue. "I've never actually played an original, to be honest," says Tremonti. "Ever since I started touring, I needed that clean tone. I bought a Fender Twin, and I've never been able to replace it." Meanwhile, Kennedy tells us the Top 5 effects he keeps on his board, including a Fulltone Clyde wah. "I've used this pedal religiously since the day I bought it," he says. "It sounds amazing, it's built like a tank, and it's held up without any problems for 16 years."

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ELECTRIC ÉTUDES
Jason Becker
By Jamie Humphries

NEW FOOTAGE

In our new DIY video, "How to Mic Your Amp for Stellar Tone," Nashville session guitarist Bryan Clark teaches you several proven techniques and compares the sounds of different mic types and positions. You'll hear various configurations of dynamic, large-diaphragm, and ribbon mics recorded through a studio console, and explore basic and more advanced setups.

And don't miss out on all the NAMM coverage we've been rolling out! After you check out our editors' picks from the show (p.112), head online to premierguitar.com/namm2014 to access more than 100 demo videos featuring the latest, hottest tone toys.

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"Guitarists, you know you've got a problem when…"
@DaveWeiner

"I made @szlachtology play with an exotic RC booster tonight. Now I don't have play well at all."
@EmilWerstler

"Back in the studio this week with Toto. 5 tracks in so far. It's a HUGE sounding record. I love the BIG production. Why do something small?"
@SteveLukather

"Our first show, 30 yrs ago today, Feb 17, 1984. Courtesy of Heavy Metal legend Brian Lew. #Megadeth"
@DaveMustaine

WORKSHOP

Robben Ford Announces Camp

Robben Ford has teamed up with slide master Sonny Landreth for Guitar Dojo, a four-day-long workshop held from August 4-8 at the Full Moon Resort in the Catskill Forest Preserve.

In addition to his robust profile as a world-class musician, Ford is a highly sought-after educator with a series of interactive videos. The camp will include master classes, one-on-one sessions, landmark live performances with sit-in opportunities, and all-inclusive meal options and lodging accommodations.

"I've been wanting to do something like this for years because teaching is very personal to me," Ford says. "There is so much information out there—different players, pedals, amps, and guitars—that a lot of people have trouble finding themselves. It's my aim to help people connect to their own inner creativity as guitarists so that each participant can unlock their potential."

Though they've traveled in similar circles and occasionally worked together, this event marks the first in-depth and prolonged interaction between these two musical giants. "Sonny and I have been acquainted for years but never spent a length of time together," says Ford. "I'm really happy to finally get a chance to do something with him. What he does is so beautiful and soulful." "Robben Ford is one of my biggest heroes, and he is one of the most unique players of all time. We have a lot to draw from—it will feel like coming home," mentions Landreth.

dojoguitarcamp.com

CAMP

Joe Satriani, Paul Gilbert, Andy Timmons, and Mike Keneally Announce The G4 Experience

The G4 Experience is an extension of the G3 concept spawned by Joe over 15 years ago, bringing together some of the best hands and minds in rock guitar. This unique guitar retreat is open to guitarists of all ages and levels and provides a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hang out with and learn from Joe, Paul, Andy, and Mike. It will take place at Cambria Pines Lodge in Cambria, CA from August 11-15, 2014.

The intimate G4 Experience is available for a maximum of 175 attendees. The event size is limited so every guest will have the opportunity to spend time with each of the featured artists. This unique music camp is open to guitarists of all ages and levels and provides an entertaining and educational once-in-a-lifetime vacation experience.

Camp tuition includes four nights lodging, meals, master classes, breakout sessions, live performances, and jam sessions. Every attendee will also receive a welcome kit with items including Joe Satriani and Paul Gilbert guitar picks, and a commemorative G4 Experience poster.

HACKATHON

Slash Announces Hackathon for SXSW

Slash is heading to music week in Austin during SXSW 2014 to launch Slashathon, the first-ever artist-focused hackathon. Powered by Geeklist, Slashathon is a hackathon where developers create applications and technology within a 12-hour period. The music-oriented Slashathon will offer developers a unique challenge to create solutions for artists to engage their communities for an album release. Slashathon will take place Wednesday, March

12 at Capitol Factory (701 Brazos St., STE 1601, Austin, TX).

The grand prize includes a Gibson guitar autographed by Slash, $1,000, and the opportunity to have Slash use the winning hack with the release of his new album, coming out in late 2014. The judges for Slashathon will be Slash himself, Bram Cohen, (chief scientist and founder of BitTorrent), and Ben Parr (co-founder and managing partner of DominateFund). **slashathon.com**

APP

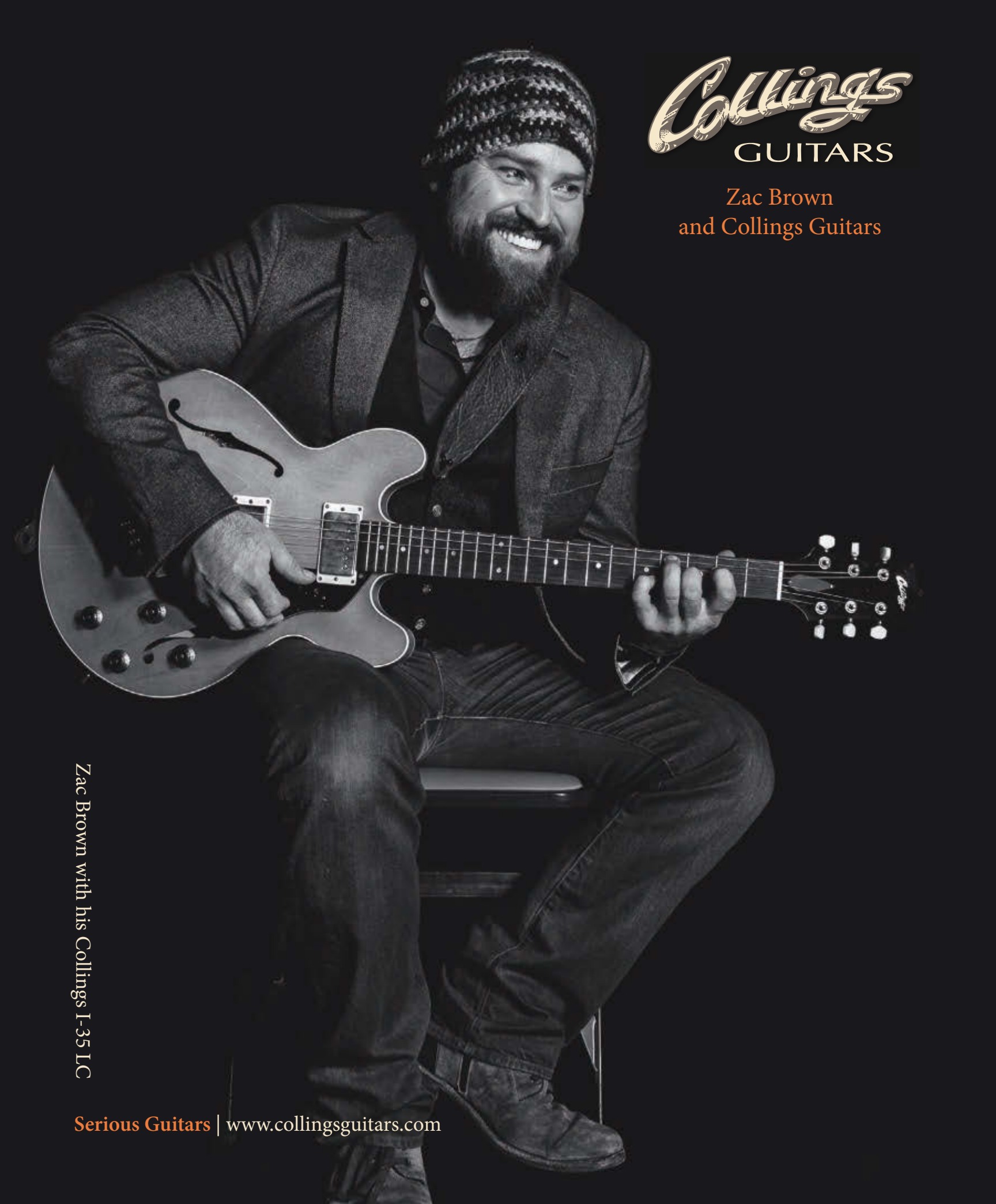
Steve Vai Releases Vai360° iOS App

Guitarist Steve Vai brings fans a revolutionary virtual experience with the release of Vai360°, an innovative new iOS app that includes two groundbreaking interactive capabilities and many unique features. Exclusive to this app are a 360° interactive live-concert experience and the capability to virtually transport fans to Vai's personal studio.

Within the app, fans can view three songs captured using Mativision multi-camera 360° video technology from Vai's recent show at the Hammersmith Apollo in London. Each user can direct the show by manipulating Mativision's multi-camera iOS player, seamlessly choosing to watch from among six different cameras. Users are able to rotate camera angles, use the device's built-in gyroscope, or simply switch to "auto pilot" to enjoy the show without interaction. Users may also virtually tour Vai's studio, Harmony Hut, using the same technology as during the concert—guided by Vai himself.

Along with the cutting-edge interactive content, the Vai360° app also includes continually updated photos of Vai's guitars, picks, and equipment, as well as current information about Vai including a biography, discography, photos, and tour information.

Mativision plans to deliver frequent updates to the app, providing additional exclusive content. The Vai360° app is available on the iOS App Store for $4.99.



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GUITARS

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Zac Brown with his Collings I-35 LC

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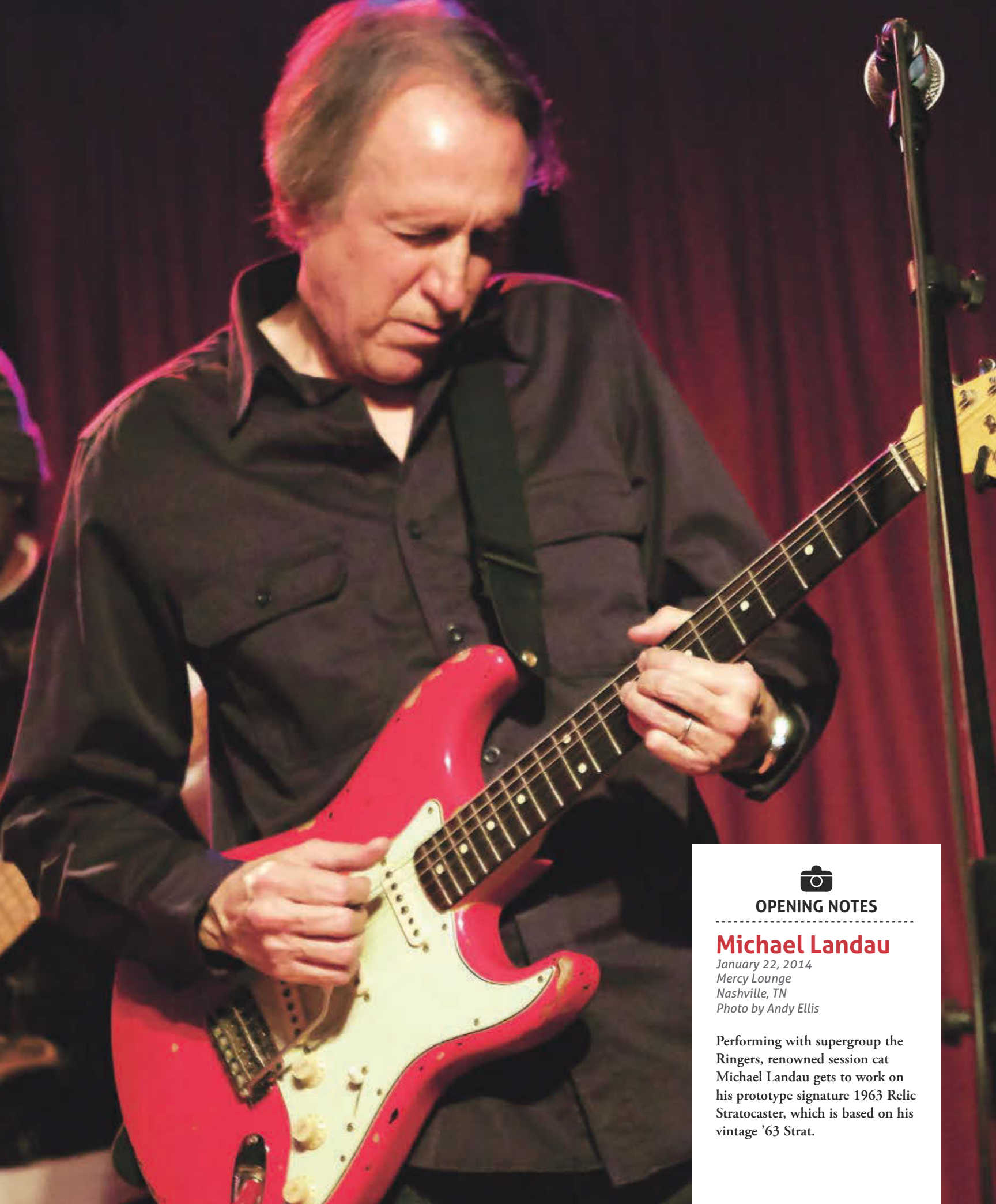
OPENING NOTES

Victor Wooten

December 14, 2013
Paradise Rock Club
Boston, MA
Photo by Rich Gastwirt

The low-end wizard finds a sweet spot while dishing the funk with an EMG PJ-set-packed Fodera Victor Wooten Yin Yang Deluxe—his main bass for the past 10 years.



OPENING NOTES

Michael Landau

January 22, 2014
Mercy Lounge
Nashville, TN
Photo by Andy Ellis

Performing with supergroup the Ringers, renowned session cat Michael Landau gets to work on his prototype signature 1963 Relic Stratocaster, which is based on his vintage '63 Strat.

OPENING NOTES

Tosin Abasi

February 1, 2014
Metro Theatre
Sydney, Australia
Photo by Ben Hosking

Animals as Leaders' Tosin Abasi delivers a storm of prog metal to fans Down Under with an Ibanez TAM100, his 8-string signature model packed with a trio of DiMarzio Ionizer 8 pups.

OPENING NOTES

Ana Popović

February 4, 2014
Dimitriou's Jazz Alley
Seattle, WA
Photo by Kirk Stauffer

The blueswoman fires up a Seattle crowd with soulful tunes through her No. 1, an all-original '64 Strat that's traveled the world with her since she picked it up in Nashville three years ago.

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Charles Thompson & Joey Santiago

PIXIES

FACTOID
Thompson runs his electrics and acoustics through his Vox AC30s.

Premier Guitar *met with Duncan Swift—guitar tech for Pixies frontman Charles Thompson (aka Black Francis, Frank Black)—and guitarist Joey Santiago before the influential alt-rockers' February 2014 show at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville.*

CHARLES THOMPSON'S GEAR

Guitars: Thompson has two stock vintage Teles, two '50s Martins—a D-28 and a D-18—and 1963 Gibson SG Jr.

Amps: The Teles, SG, *and* Martins go through vintage Vox AC30 heads driving Vox cabs. Weber MiniMASS attenuators keep volume reasonable in smaller venues.

Effects: Thompson's board includes a Boss TU-2 tuner, Klon Centaur, a silicon-fuzz Duh pedal built by *PG* senior editor Joe Gore, a Boss FS-5L for his Vox's tremolo circuit, and a Lehle Dual SGoS for switching between his tuner and his electric and acoustic signal paths—the latter of which uses a Radial J48 active direct box. A Voodoo Lab Pedal Power 2 Plus powers everything.

JOEY SANTIAGO'S GEAR

Guitars: Santiago goes big with a Les Paul humbucker assault, occasionally showing a sweeter side with his Bigsby-equipped 1965 Gibson ES-345, which features a Varitone switch that the guitarist usually keeps on position 3.

Amps: A Marshall JCM800 50-watt is Santiago's mainstay for dirty tones—he's used it on every album and tour. For clean tones and extra definition, he runs his vintage Fender Vibrolux Reverb on 7, occasionally employing the amp's lush verb and tremolo. He keeps a newer Vibrolux on hand as a backup, too.

Effects: Santiago controls his pedals with a GigRig G2 switcher. His stompboxes include a Boss LS-2 Line Selector, Keeley Compressor, Swart Atomic Boost OC44, Boss FZ-2 Hyper Fuzz, Fulltone OCD, Maxon AD9Pro analog delay, Empress Tremolo,a DOD FX-17 wah-volume, an Electro-Harmonix Holy Grail Nano, a TC Electronic PolyTune, and a Lehle Dual SGoS for amp switching. Three Moog Moogerfoogers—an MF-104M analog delay, an MF-108M Cluster Flux, and an MF-105 MIDI MuRF—are hidden under the top deck. They're switched by a GigRig QuarterMaster, and a Roland EV-5 controls different Moog parameters. A Boss FS-6 footswitch controls the Vibrolux's tremolo. All pedals are powered by a GigRig Modular Power Supply setup.

JONNY LANG

FACTOID
Lang's '58 Les Paul Standard reissue is literally the first Les Paul he ever played.

Grammy-winning, Tele-smacking, Les Paul-wielding guitar great Jonny Lang met with Premier Guitar *before his show at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center in Nashville to talk about his two favorite road axes and play some impromptu blues. We also learned that everybody loves to read about pedals.*

GUITARS

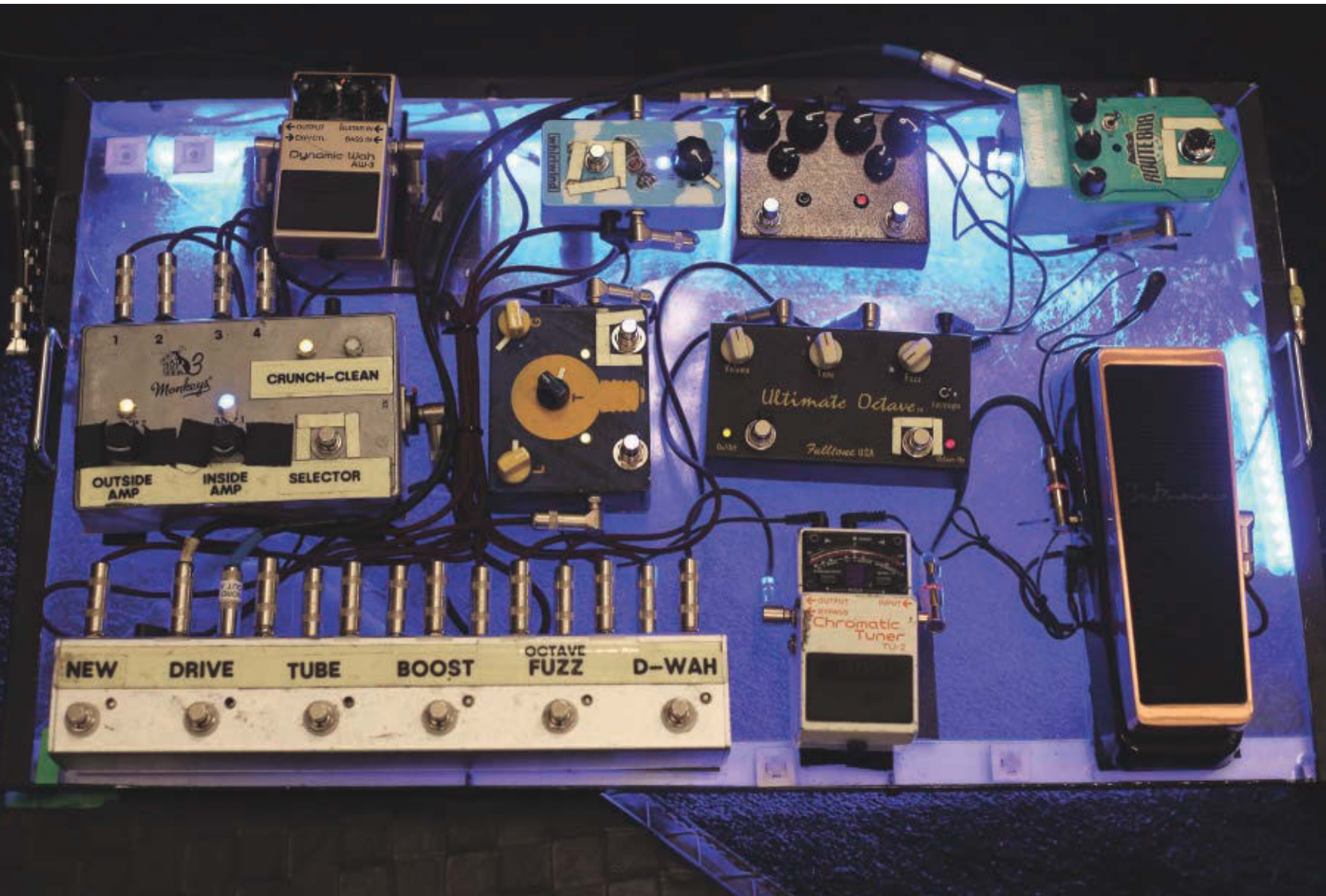
With just three guitars, Lang travels light. When he wants to go acoustic, he grabs his Martin J-40 with a stock Martin pickup. For electric, Lang's No. 1 has always been a Fender Telecaster—a tribute to his musical heroes, Albert Collins and Tab Benoit. In 2003, Fender made him this custom Thinline beauty, which has a maple top and sports three Bill Lawrence humbuckers. When not on the Tele, Lang relies on his Gibson 1958 Les Paul Standard reissue that has a special mojo he's never found in any other Les Paul.

AMPS

Lang's two main stage amps are housed in Fender '65 Deluxe Reverb reissue cabinets whose guts have been stripped out and replaced with vintage-spec circuits. However, the normal channel is modified to be very clean and the vibrato channel is crunchier. One amp is arranged behind the other so that the microphone in front of the rear amp picks up tones from the front amp.

EFFECTS

Lang's Trailer Trash pedalboard is all about dirt, gain, and wah. A Monster Cable runs into a Jim Dunlop Joe Bonamassa Cry Baby wah, a Boss TU-2 tuner, and a custom switcher that can divert the signal to an Analog Man King of Tone, a Whirlwind The Bomb boost, a Visual Sound V2 Route 808, a Fulltone Ultimate Octave, a JAM Pedals Tube Dreamer, and a Boss AW-3 Dynamic Wah. A 3 Monkeys switcher selects between amp channels.



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JIMBO MATHUS

By Emile Menasché

Founding Squirrel Nut Zipper Jimbo Mathus talks about Romantic poetry, losing his ego, and the raw intensity of his latest record with the Tri-State Coalition.

Don't look for gloss on the latest release from veteran singer-songwriter/guitarist Jimbo Mathus and his band the Tri-State Coalition. Starting with the body-punch impact of the opening title track and carrying on for eleven more songs, *Dark Night of the Soul* delivers American rock 'n' roll with a raw intensity rare in an era when every note is tweaked to so-called perfection.

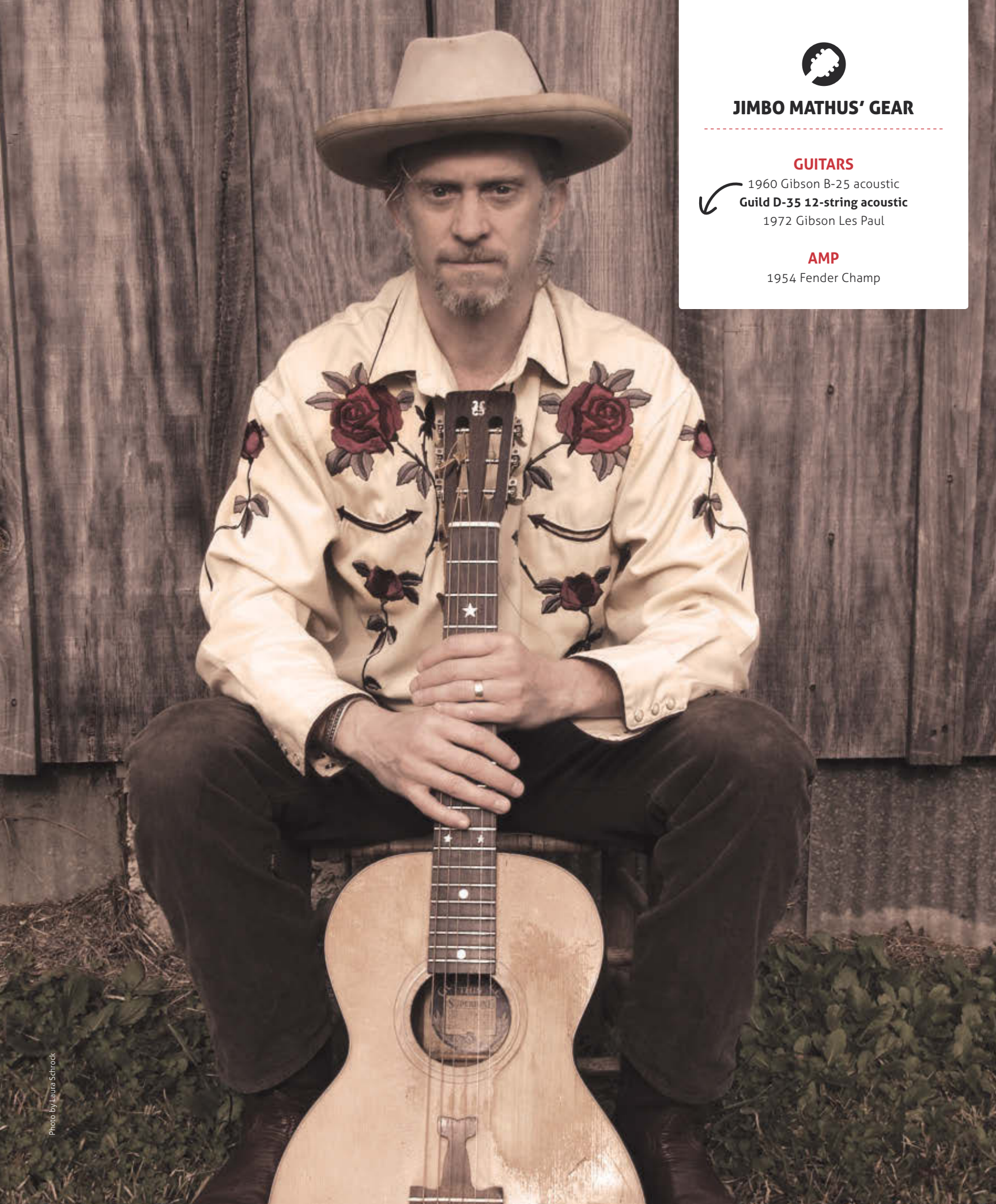
For the Mississippi native—who first came to fame as leader of the swing-revival band Squirrel Nut Zippers—the sound of *Dark Night of the Soul* mirrors the process of writing and recording. Working with producer Bruce Watson at Dial Back Sound studio in Water Valley, Mississippi, Mathus says he brought to life ideas he may have ignored or set aside in the past. He's also quick to credit the members of the Coalition.

"There's no way to cut a record like this one without a good band—it starts with them." By "them," he means co-guitarists Matt "Pizzle" Pierce and Eric "Roscoe" Amble, bassist Matt Patton, keyboardist Eric Carlton, and drummer Ryan Rogers. But before they could bring their intensity to the tracks, Mathus had to write—and that's where our conversation started.

Where do your songs start—do you come up with something on guitar first?
Very rarely do I find anything on the guitar, though it does happen. They just usually hit me like a bolt of lightning. I've been writing for so long that I can hear the music in my head. Usually they just come to me in my imagination, and as soon as I get to a guitar or a piano I can bust it out.

The album's themes are very personal—and powerful. What's your goal as a lyricist?
I've been doing it so long and so habitually that it's just a part of my thought process. I mean, I'm never *not* writing a song. I think about a lot of things, I read a lot, and I talk to a lot of people, and certain things just leap out at me as worthy topics. I don't like to over-say things. I believe in simple phrases that have a lot of different meanings.

How do these songs reflect you today, compared to what you would have written 20 years ago?
I'm able to say so much more. There are themes on this record, like this first song, "Dark Night of the Soul," involving heavy philosophy, history, archaeology. I attempted to write



JIMBO MATHUS' GEAR

GUITARS

1960 Gibson B-25 acoustic

Guild D-35 12-string acoustic

1972 Gibson Les Paul

AMP

1954 Fender Champ

Photo by Laura Schrock

"This is my idea of a great guitar collection," says Jimbo Mathus of these homemade instruments.

a song when I was 18 about an ancient mystery in Mexico, and failed miserably. Over the years, I'm still fascinated by mysteries and still want to write about them, but I feel like the practice has paid off. I feel satisfied with my direction in writing.

Do you try to leave room for the listener to bring in their own interpretation of the songs?
That's the way I've learned and trained myself to write. Like romantic poetry, for example, where words are packed with meaning and can mean myriad things. I've studied with a poetry teacher from University of North Carolina, and he taught me the philosophy of the English language. You say a lot with a few words, and you understate it in order for it to be passed on, open to interpretation. That's what I like in writing, movies, art—that space where you jump in.

Who are your influences—beyond your guitar heroes?
The 1950s Charlie Parker recordings on Savoy Records are my favorite things to listen to. I get most of my lyric ideas from the Romantic poets. Charlie Patton is one of my main influences. Keith Richards. Captain Beefheart's *Trout Mask Replica*. I like folk music, all of that "old, weird America," as they say. It's hard to narrow it down. I am a Southerner and an aficionado of the Deep South, so I draw my influences from [William] Faulkner, Charlie Patton, Muddy Waters—these types of things.

How did the actual recording process take shape?
It was quite simple: Every song was demoed once, with me on my own. Songs like "Casey Caught the Cannon Ball," "Tallahatchie," "Burn the Ships," and "Medicine" were done in one day. The demo is what you hear on the record. I'd have an acoustic guitar and a live vocal mic. Bronson Tew would be on drums. Then I'd drop in a bass, or Bronson would drop a bass and I'd slap on some lead guitar. If Eric Carlton happened to be the there, he'd drop a keyboard on. Bruce [Watson, producer] was like, "I refuse to let you touch these—they're done." I was like, "Cool—you like 'em, I like 'em."

The other eight songs were partially finished demos with just guitar and drums and vocal. The band had the demos for two or three months, and we cut all those songs in just two or three days. We cut them live, with live vocals. And "Dark Night of the Soul" was a brand-new thing the band had never heard. You are listening to the first or second take on the record, and Bruce had the balls to make it the first song on the record.

How would you describe your role as a guitarist?
I was mostly on my acoustic. I was really just sitting there leading the band and singing. Most of the parts Matt Pierce played were on my demos—I'd drop his little sketch on there. He's a very talented, hook-writing guitarist, like Roscoe. And sometimes they'd hash their parts out on the studio floor. By the time it got to the recording itself, I played just the campfire chords on the acoustic, because I like to have that acoustic on my rock 'n' roll. I played the Les Paul that introduces "White Angel" and the lead on "Windows." Matt plays the solo on the end. I do my work on the demo side, and on the record I'm worrying about my singing.

You can't cut eight songs in two days without a great band. The casualness and intensity. I struggled to find the people I really wanted. Roscoe has been with me for about three years now. Matt is my brother-in-law, and he's been with me about eight years now.

Is it hard to let go and let the other guitarists come up with their parts?
Man, it's been a goal of mine since a very early age to remove the ego from music. It's something I was able to do with the Squirrel Nut Zippers. That was a seven-piece band that had to be arranged so there was room for everybody to be heard. It reflects back to my beginnings in music—the big family gatherings with banjos, guitars, fiddles, etc. It's an egoless process: It's not my thing or your thing—it's *our* thing! I was raised on the social aspect of music, and I've carried that idea ever since then. I can't have it any other way, and it shows in the music. I'd rather quit than play with ego.

> **"It's been a goal of mine since a very early age to remove the ego from music … It's not my thing or your thing—it's our thing!"**

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How locked in were the arrangements?
In this ensemble there's really no room to improvise once the song is laid out. It's a five-piece band, and everybody's being careful to not clutter each other up. There's not a lot of room to lose yourself in that spontaneity—but you lose yourself in the song.

Some players who also sing say they feel more connected when they sing and play at the same time, as opposed to recording an isolated vocal.

I totally agree with that. If you listen to B.B. King or Little Milton—or any of the guitarists who play and sing and incorporate the two together—that's where you're into a really heavy thing. Your whole body, mind, and soul are engaged.

The album is already getting some great response. What's next?
We've got a huge tour booked. My hopes are that this is our year. I don't think we can do better for rock 'n' roll than we did with *Dark Night*.

YOUTUBE IT

Watch Jimbo Mathus and the Tri-State Coalition in action at Ground Zero in Clarksdale, Mississippi.

YouTube search term: Jimbo Mathus - America's Blues Concert Series 5

Photo by Elizabeth DeCicco

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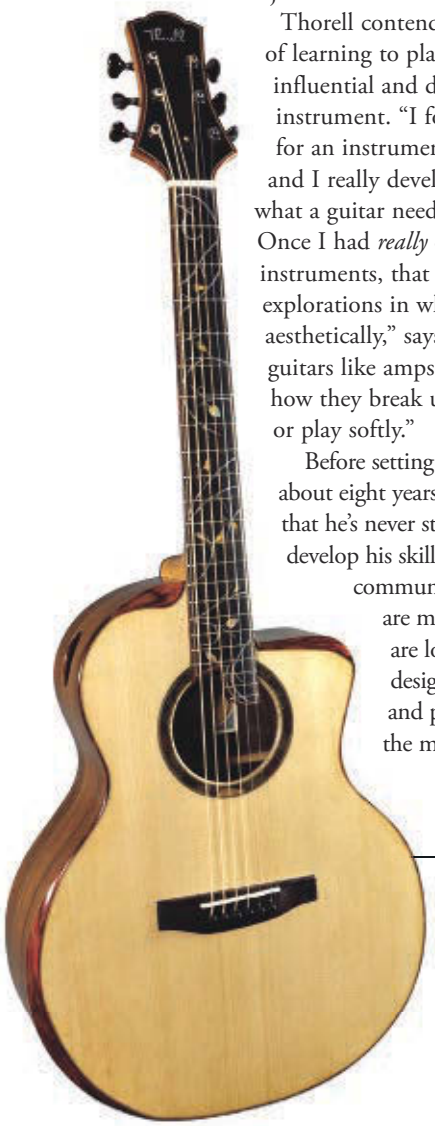
Thorell Guitars

BY RICH OSWEILER

Ryan Thorell got an early start building guitars at age 14. He was already playing quite a bit at the time, and like many rockers his age, he was big into Metallica and Skid Row. It was fitting that his first guitar design included a "battle-axe headstock with an eyeball logo crying blood down the fretboard."

One *probably* wouldn't suspect the heavy metal background when checking out Thorell's wares today. His master-crafted instruments—from archtops to flattops to nylon-stringed guitars and more—represent the pinnacle of high-end lutherie. In fact, his guitars are the go-to weapons for jazz extraordinaire Frank Vignola.



Thorell contends that the early stages of learning to play the guitar were most influential and defined his sense of the instrument. "I found that I had an affinity for an instrument to respond in certain ways and I really developed a good intuition for what a guitar needed to be able to do as a tool. Once I had *really* dedicated myself to building instruments, that became a good basis for my explorations in what can be done sonically and aesthetically," says the luthier. "I also think of guitars like amps, in that I try to influence how they break up or don't as you push them or play softly."

Before setting out on his own, Thorell did about eight years of apprenticeships and says that he's never stopped trying to learn and develop his skills. "I look at my guitars as communal pieces of art, in that they are my responses to what my clients are looking for. If I can build and design from a place of excitement and passion about what I do, all the motives and reasons are right."

Thorell winds all his own pickups and mostly builds DeArmond-style pups with adjustable pole pieces housed in an ebony case. He uses a slightly wider aperture for the pickup and winds them hot so they're a "bit fatter in tone but still really crisp." He builds various other pickups and prefers to wind them himself because it gives him more quality control.

"I also think of guitars like amps, in that I try to influence how they break up or don't as you push them or play softly."

When it comes to tonewoods, Thorell admits he has a special affinity for walnut. "I have been around it my whole life. My grandfather cut it and loved it, and I've used it everywhere. There is nothing like Cache Valley black walnut," he says. "I love other woods, and even other walnuts, but local handsawn walnut always gives me reverence. I've also been using a lot of Douglas fir."

One obstacle Thorell faces as a boutique builder is that some guitarists don't consider a finely built instrument as a worthy investment when there are many less-expensive options. "It's unlike the violin or classical guitar world where there are a large amount of great inexpensive instruments, but serious players know and have a tradition of seeking out instruments that respond as fully as possible and allow them more freedom of expression. In those worlds, it's the experience more than the name that people are purchasing and they are willing to make a proper investment because they appreciate the rewards."

When asked what model best represents his work, the luthier says it's always his latest build. "Every one is so unique and I approach each with such passion that it's hard to see it any other way. It is more of a timeline than a product line."

thorellguitars.com

PRICING & AVAILABILITY

Thorell's shop is located in Logan, Utah, where he builds approximately 20 guitars annually with the help of his apprentice of two years, Nate Wood. Thorell guitars are sold both direct and through a handful of global dealers, with a wait time of about a year. Prices vary greatly from $5,500 to $20,000 depending on build options (most of these instruments are custom designs).

The Grand

This large-sized flattop is meant to deliver the open and powerful sound of a dreadnought, yet still provide the response characteristics needed for modern fingerstyle and picking. Stunning wood appointments abound: The Grand shown here features Brazilian rosewood for the back and sides, cocobolo binding, Adirondack spruce for the top, and a figured mahogany neck that's topped with an ebony fretboard. The delicate fretboard inlays have a combination of black mother-of-pearl, aluminum, and honey jasper.

FV Premier

The FV Premier was originally commissioned by jazz great Frank Vignola and built with the intention of providing versatile and clear acoustic tone with a fusion of Gypsy, archtop, and flattop sounds. This FV Premier boasts Lutz spruce for the top, figured cocobolo binding, walnut for the back and sides, and a mahogany neck that's capped with an ebony fretboard. For electronics, the FV Premier is outfitted with a blade-style P-90 called the San Rafael.

Sweet "E"

Thorell's Sweet "E" model is a traditional X-braced archtop inspired by the great masters of this building genre, and each guitar is custom voiced to a player's needs and desires. The soundboard on this vintage-burst finished beauty is spruce; while the back, sides, binding, and neck are carved from maple. The Sweet "E" is equipped with one of Thorell's floating, hum-cancelling Lone Peak pickups.

Red Sky Deluxe

Thorell's latest model is an archtop that's finished with a natural vintage-burst spruce for the top; maple for the back, sides, and neck; Bocote binding; and ebony for the fretboard. The fretboard is graced with Thorell's "Z" block inlay. The Thorell Thunder Bowl pickup that's installed is a DeArmond-style single-coil with fully shielded, under-mount controls.

1960 Gibson Melody Maker

BY ZACHARY FJESTAD

Q: **Hello Zach,**
I'm hoping you can provide me some information about my Gibson Melody Maker guitar. I'm 72 and retired now, and played it some when I was very young. I believe it's somewhere around a 1960s model, but I'm not sure. It's in good condition for its age, and everything works except the tone knob. The case is a little rough, but still very usable. A local music store offered me $450, but I don't know if this is a fair price or not. A ballpark value and any other information about this guitar would be appreciated.
Thank you,
Frank in Proctor, Minnesota

A: **Hi Frank,**
Cool guitar! Let me start by saying that it's a smart move to find out what your guitar is *really* worth before you consider selling it. While money talks and a lot of guitar owners might be quick to action, it's important to be informed about the assets you have so you can make the best financial decision.

Above: Up until 1961, Gibson dated solidbodies by using the first number of the serial number to indicate the last digit of the year built, confirming that this Melody Maker is a 1960.

Left: This Gibson Melody Maker is in excellent shape and probably worth at least three times more than what was offered to the owner.

Gibson's Melody Maker was the ultimate guitar for beginners in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Cheap to produce and popular with the emerging rock 'n' roll scene, Gibson made thousands of them in the 1960s. The Melody Maker was just one of many guitars released under Ted McCarty's term as president and visionary of Gibson between 1948 and 1966.

A quick glance at the Melody Maker shows the similarity in design to the timeless Les Paul. Gibson first introduced the solidbody Les Paul guitar in 1952, and it quickly became very popular. It was expensive, however, and plans were already underway by the end of 1953 to produce a more affordable model called the Les Paul Junior.

By the late 1950s, the Les Paul Junior was outselling all other Les Paul models combined, and Gibson took note of how well Fender's budget-model Musicmaster was doing. In 1959, Gibson introduced the Melody Maker sans any mention of the Les Paul name on the guitar.

The Melody Maker was essentially a budget version of the Les Paul Junior with a thinner body, a narrow headstock without the wings, and a thinner pickup with no pole pieces. A 3/4-sized Melody Maker debuted the same year as well. The affordable Melody Maker became Gibson's best-selling solidbody guitar by the mid-1960s. It also followed design changes similar to the Les Paul Junior with the introduction of a rounded double-cutaway body in 1961, and then an SG-style body in 1963. The Melody Maker was produced through 1970 before it was rebranded as the SG-100/SG-200/SG-250 series.

Your guitar is a 1960 Melody Maker. We can tell this by the single-cutaway body that was only produced between 1959 and 1961, and the "0 53XX" serial number. Until 1961, Gibson solidbodies were dated with the first number of the serial number corresponding to the last digit of the year built: The "0" represents 1960. Your Melody Maker features a mahogany body and neck, rosewood fretboard, a single pickup, and knobs for volume and tone. It also appears that you have the original alligator-skin-style case. It's not a high-end case, but *original* is the key word here.

Based on your guitar's condition—which appears to be 90 percent (excellent)—it's currently worth between $1,300 and $1,650. Not bad for a guitar that was originally designed as a budget model, and certainly higher than the amount you were offered. I'd suggest getting the tone knob fixed before you sell the guitar. More than likely, the potentiometer is bad and needs replacing, but that's an inexpensive repair. Then you'll have a guitar with no issues—much easier to sell for what you deserve to get out of it.

The low offer on your Melody Maker shows how important it is to do your research when buying or selling a guitar, *especially* if it's something that's been sitting in a closet for several years and may have appreciated in value. Don't let someone try to convince you that your treasure is actually trash.

It's always fun when a guitar ends up being worth more than you thought, making it a true gem!

ZACHARY R. FJESTAD *is author of Blue Book of Acoustic Guitars, Blue Book of Electric Guitars, and Blue Book of Guitar Amplifiers. For more information, visit bluebookinc.com or email Zach at guitars@bluebookinc.com.*

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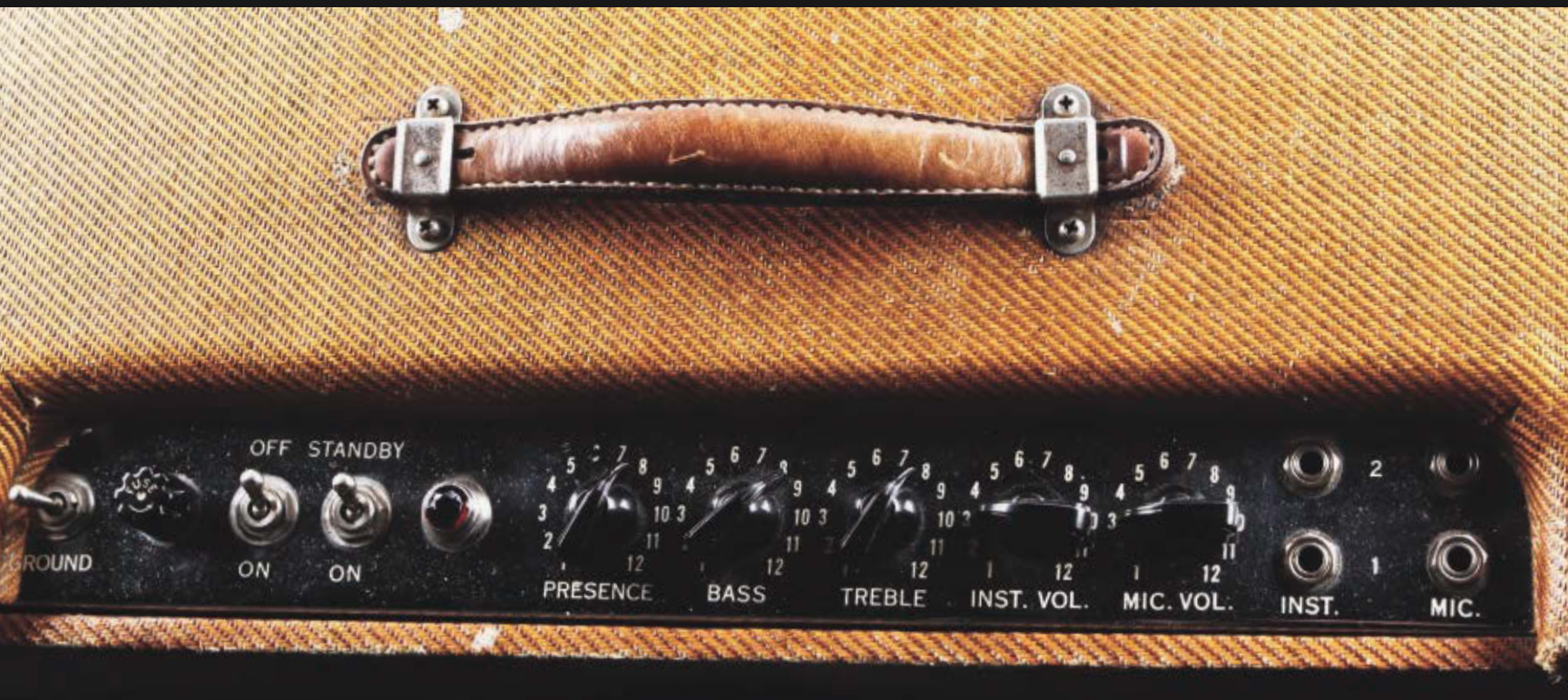
OFF STANDBY
GROUND
ON
ON
PRESENCE
BASS
TREBLE
INST. VOL.
MIC. VOL.
INST.
MIC.

1955 Fender Bandmaster

BY DAVE ROGERS, LAUN BRAITHWAITE, AND TIM MULLALLY

In 1938 Leo Fender opened a shop specializing in radio and electronics repair. By 1946 he was manufacturing amplifiers and electric lap steels as the Fender Electric Instrument Co. Leo's hard work and willingness to listen to feedback from working musicians made Fender amps top sellers by the '50s. Other companies copied Fender's constantly improving designs.

As Fender's 1950s product line grew to include electric guitars and electric basses, more amplifier models were added, with the Bandmaster debuting in 1953. It was Fender's third 1x15, dual 6L6 amp, following the Pro and the Bassman. The Bandmaster's biggest innovation was a new tone circuit with independent bass and treble controls, as opposed to the one-knob tone circuit of the earlier models.

The 1x15 Bandmaster lasted until mid 1955, when all Fender amps received a narrow-panel makeover (the previous incarnations had wider front panels, and before that, "TV" fronts). The narrow-panel Bandmaster had three 10" speakers.

The 1955 Fender Bandmaster shown here has features common to most narrow-panel models made between 1955 and 1960. These include: two channels labeled MIC and INST; a volume control for each channel; treble, bass, and presence controls; and standby and on/off switches, along with a ground switch. The 26-watt amp has two 6L6G power tubes, three preamp tubes (one 12AY7 and two 12AX7s), and a 5U4G rectifier. The 21 1/4" x 22 1/2" x 10 1/2" cabinet houses three Jensen P10R speakers, the top one with its blue bell cover removed to fit in front of the tubes and chassis.

The narrow-panel tweed Bandmaster is best remembered today as the amp Pete Townshend used to such great effect on The Who's 1971 album *Who's Next*. He paired it with a 1960 Gretsch 6120 Chet Atkins model to create shimmering guitar orchestrations.

In 1955 a Bandmaster had a list price of $289.50. The amp's current value is $10,000. The 1961 price for a 6120 Chet Atkins hollowbody was $475. The guitar's current value is $7,500.

Sources for this article include Fender Amps: The First Fifty Years by John Teagle and John Sprung, Gretsch 6120: The History of a Legendary Guitar by Edward Ball, and The Soul of Tone: Celebrating 60 Years of Fender Amps by Tom Wheeler.

Original price: 1955 Fender Bandmaster, $289.50; 1961 Gretsch 6120, $475.

Current estimated market value: 1955 Fender Bandmaster, $10,000; 1961 Gretsch 6120, $7,500.

DAVE'S GUITAR SHOP

Dave Rogers' collection is tended by Laun Braithwaite and Tim Mullally and is on display at:
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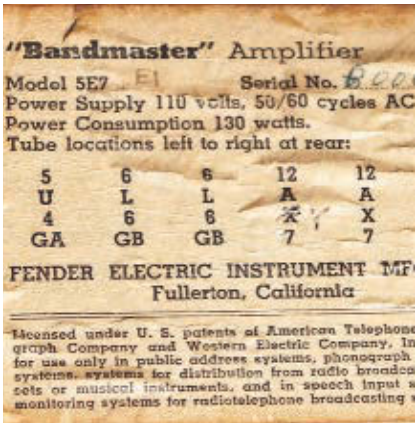
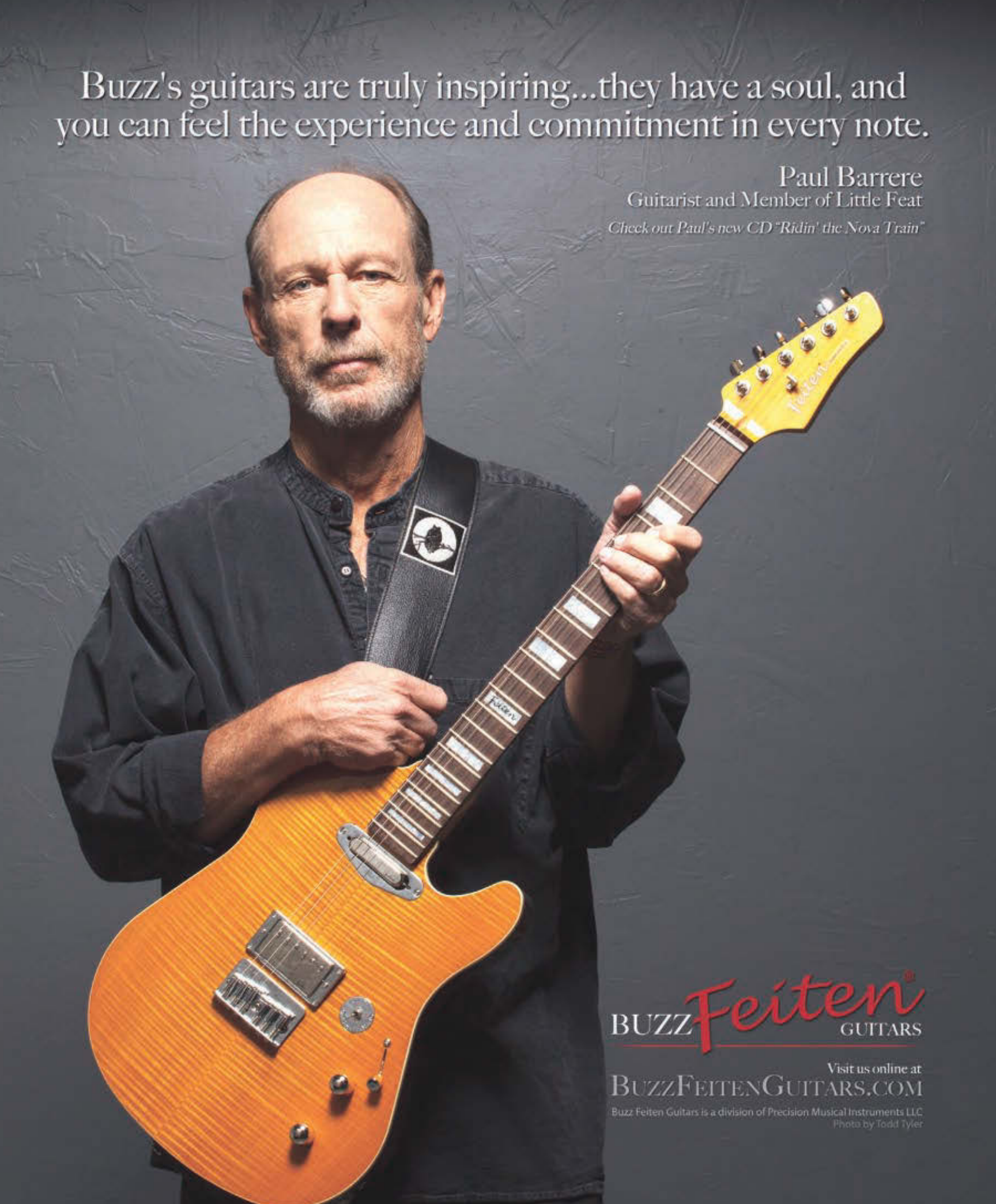
Photos by Mullally and text by Braithwaite.



Opposite page: (Top) A narrow-panel tweed Bandmaster and a Gretsch 6120: a perfect pair in the '50s—and on *Who's Next*. (Bottom) The '55 Bandmaster offered four inputs—two each for instruments and mics.

Left: Fender had to remove the bell cover from the middle 10" speaker to fit it in front of the tubes and chassis.

Above: With its dual 6L6GB power tubes, the Bandmaster was one of Fender's more powerful tweed amps.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NATHAN EAST & WILL LEE

BASS BROTHERS

Will interviews Nathan.
Nathan interviews Will.

IT'S A SUPER-BASS SUMMIT!

BY JASON SHADRICK

Though they rarely share the same stage, bassists Nathan East and Will Lee have had strikingly similar musical journeys. Both came up through the then-bountiful studio scene (East in L.A. and Lee in New York) and became first-call sideman on their respective coasts. During that time both bassists developed a reputation for substance over flash while praying at the altar of Larry Graham and Chuck Rainey. Since 1982 Lee has held down the bass chair on David Letterman's late night show while doing sessions, serving in the house band for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductions, and issuing several solo albums. East is more of a road dog: For many years he served with Eric Clapton while recording and performing with everyone from Sting and Stevie Wonder to Phil Collins and Toto.

Both bassists recently added important new entries to their extensive discographies. Lee's solo album *Love, Gratitude and Other Distractions* embraces everything from dirty NOLA blues with the Reverend Billy Gibbons to heartfelt jazz standards. For East, it was time to step outside of his longtime group Fourplay for his first-ever solo release, which boasts Stevie Wonder tunes (with the man himself), orchestral textures, and a touching duet on the Beatles "Yesterday" with Nathan's son Noah.

We decided to let the two bass greats interview each other about their respective projects. Naturally, they couldn't resist talking shop, swapping stories, and paying tribute to some of their heroes. Let's listen.

Will Lee drops a low G with his thumb while drummer Steve Gadd looks on during a show in Japan.

Photo by Sandrine Lee

Lee: Well, it's an honor to be considered in the same sentence as Nathan East.

East: Come on, man! You're stealing my line! [*Laughs.*] I was thinking earlier today about the first time we met. When was that?

Lee: One of the first times I actually remember meeting you—and I'm sure it happened before then, because I have a history of being a drug addict and alcoholic, so there are parts of my life that aren't clear—was at Live Aid.

East: Oh, wow. Yeah, that was '85.

Lee: I'm sure we must have met before then. That was the year I got sober. You were there with Kenny Loggins, and you were just as nice then as you always are.

East: I'd heard of you as far back as '82. There was a session that [guitarist] Chuck Loeb and I met at for a Patrick Williams record at Clinton Studios. You were probably the only cat who *wasn't* there—it was Steve Gadd, both Breckers. And I was like, "Why am *I* here?" because you were right down the street. [*Laughs.*] You must have been busy.

Lee: As you know, there was a time when sessions were rampant. And in New York, because of the proximity of everything, it was easy to do five or eight sessions a day. There was a lot of running around. There were times I'd head to a vocal session and leave my bass in the trunk of a cab because I'd be so frazzled. We should have had multiple basses and just left them at studios. But we weren't thinking about that. We had our favorite bass, and that was the one we wanted to have with us.

East: What was your favorite bass during that era?

Lee: I bought a bass from Tom "Bones" Malone. It was a Fender Precision, and I didn't realize how amazing it was until it burned up in a fire in 1975. I've been trying to replace it ever since. It had such a great range of sound that I ended up playing a Jazz bass on an emergency basis after trying out so many other P basses. That bass had all the harmonics. It had presence. It didn't have that hollow Precision sound. It had a really nice, meaty sound.

East: I was a Jazz bass guy at the time, too. Then I had a cool Precision that just

had that P sound. Then I jumped on the Yamaha train. Abraham Laboriel put the first Yamaha bass in my hands, and I was like, "What is that?" Of course, it's the fingers, not the bass, but he just had the thing smoking. Thirty-some years later I'm still playing Yamahas.

Lee: It's still pretty much a glorified Jazz bass, really.

East: Exactly! I just told someone that yesterday.

Lee: My question is: If Nathan's first album is this good, how scary is the second one going to be?

East: I've been talking about this for a *long* time: literally more than two decades. Bob James and the guys in Fourplay give me such a hard time about it. I used to start making demos for a solo record, but then we'd go into making a Fourplay record, and I wouldn't be prepared for that, so my tune would just go over there. Chuck Loeb pulled me aside in Montreux a couple of years ago and said, "Nate, what's the holdup? You aren't getting any younger. Let's do this!" So we made a list of all the people it would be fun to include.

Lee: What *was* the holdup? Was there any sense of not wanting to commit to a direction?

East: Even when you make a plan, it comes out completely differently, so why even plan? But number one, Fourplay has been my solo spot because I get to write, blow, and pretty much do whatever I want. That's taken a bit of the pressure off. The other thing is just being blessed with a ton of work. If you're not on a Clapton or Phil Collins tour, or out with Herbie Hancock or Al Jarreau, you're in the studio. I didn't want it to be a weekend thing where I would go in and do two more tracks. I wanted to have some cohesiveness, and I'm glad I got a rhythm section for an entire week.

Lee: That's pretty organized, man.

East: How did you plan the sessions for your album?

Lee: I was starting to explode with ideas to the point when I just had to get them out. I started with one song, and then I recorded a second song that had nothing to do the first one. I said, "Well, this looks like the makings of a non-album!" But I'm realizing that the content of my record is, so to speak, shit I like. So that's what I went for. I didn't care about a direction. I just wanted to have a great time and make each tune its own little journey.

East: It really worked out. What was that first song that came together?

Lee: I put together an autobiographical song called "Miss Understanding." The

WILL LEE'S GEAR

BASSES

Sadowsky Will Lee NYC 4-string
Sadowsky Will Lee NYC 5-string
1961 Fender Precision
1960s Fender Precision hybrid fretless
Pedulla fretless 5-string
Line 6 Variax guitar

AMPS

Ampeg Micro-VR

EFFECTS

Boss GT-10B
Various Electro-Harmonix pedals
Xotic Effects RC Booster
Empirical Labs Distressor

STRINGS & ACCESSORIES

Sadowsky Black Label strings
GHS Precision Flats

Playing his signature Sadowsky 4-string, Lee digs in during one of his Will Lee Family Band shows with guitarist Chuck Loeb.

tune kind of wrote itself because it was just so honest from my life. I was at one of those songwriter circles up at a church in Massachusetts, where people sit around with guitars and play their own tunes and back each other up. Someone gave us a recording of it. Then there's this kindred spirit-type guy, a drummer who had been through the same scenario as the person in this song—with the same person! So I told him, "You got to hear this, because it's your story too." He liked it so much that he put a drum track to it, and it really held together. At that point you could see the potential for a completed song, so I just wiped all the tracks except the drums and recording new instruments onto his track. I thought, since we live in the age of iTunes, nobody cares about an album, and maybe I'll just put this out. But there was this other song I wanted to record with Chuck Loeb, an instrumental version of "Smile." That was the point when I realized that these songs have nothing whatsoever to do with each other. So maybe I should do an album. [*Laughs.*]

East: I'm shedding "Smile" because of that recording.

Lee: It's something I've been working on for a while. I was forced to finish it onstage in Japan, and you know what fertile ground for creativity that can be. I was with Hiram Bullock, the most fertile of fertile grounds, and he had some gear problem, so we had to stop the show. So I went up front and started to play this little bit of "Smile" that I had figured out on bass, and because I'm in the middle of it and Hiram's not ready yet, I had to keep going. At that point I was forced to finish the arrangement right there onstage. I've been carrying that around for a while, and it took someone like Chuck Loeb—not like there's anyone *like* him—to turn it into a real arrangement with his beautiful soundscape of colors.

East: That's a great memory to have of Hiram.

Lee: Absolutely. Hiram's with me every day, man. He taught me what to do onstage. There are certain people who are so strong—Jaco for example. Jaco is still kicking everyone's ass, and he's been dead for a million years.

East: He's always on your shoulder, haunting you. Saying, "Take it up a couple of notches."

Lee: Tell me how you picked the covers for your album.

East: It's usually stuff you've been digging forever. I guess the funniest, or most recent story, happened when I was in Norway. There was an 18-piece big band playing for a wedding at my hotel, and when we got back from the gig I heard them playing "Sir Duke." I just peeked my head

Photo by Sandrine Lee

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During a live preview of his latest solo album, East brought in legendary session guitarist Ray Parker, Jr.

in, and the bass player sees me and hands me his bass. The next thing I know, I'm playing with this band somewhere in Norway. I looked around and saw a room full of people I didn't know. I'm 6,000 miles away from home, and everybody's smiling. That tune is just infectious. But similarly to your story, I was in rehearsal at Carnegie Hall for one of Sting's rainforest benefits. There's some downtime, and I'm up there trying to figure out the chords to "Overjoyed," when I hear a harmonica come in, and the next thing I know Stevie Wonder is actually playing it with me. Then James Taylor, Bonnie Raitt, Elton John, and George Harrison are all standing there watching the whole thing go down. Again, I was painted into a corner and had to come up with an arrangement on the spot. When we finished, he said, "If you ever record that, call me." That's how I got him on the album.

Lee: Tell me about "Daft Funk."

East: It's a tongue-in-cheek ode to the guys in Daft Punk. Daft Punk made it cool to play again. Here's a record that went number one that didn't just have a programmed sound. It's only four chords, but it's actual *playing*.

Lee: As a session guy, you never really know what's going to hit.

East: I've played on records, and I'm sure you have too, where you think, "This is the greatest thing ever—wait until everyone hears it!" and it never does a thing. Then one day you go to work and play on something, not giving it a thought, and the next thing you know, it's a big hit. But I had a feeling "Get Lucky" was going to be something because it was Nile Rodgers and Paul Jackson, Jr., on the same song. I don't think there's room for any more funk on a two-inch piece of tape. [*Laughs.*]

Lee: That's pretty scary!

East: That in and of itself was pretty monumental. I knew that was going to make some noise. We cut some live tracks

NATHAN EAST'S GEAR

BASSES

Yamaha BBNE-2 Signature 5-string bass
Yamaha TRB 6-string bass
Yamaha SLB-200 Silent bass

AMP

TC Electronic Blacksmith

STRINGS & ACCESSORIES

Radial Engineering Firefly tube DI
Dunlop Strings
j-phonic earphones
Yamaha HPH-MT220 Headphones
Phil Jones Bass Headphones

in L.A., and then I think they took it to New York and put Nile on the songs, and then they came back, and we tweaked the bass to make it even funkier.

Lee: There was some room left? Like, "Here's a space right there!"

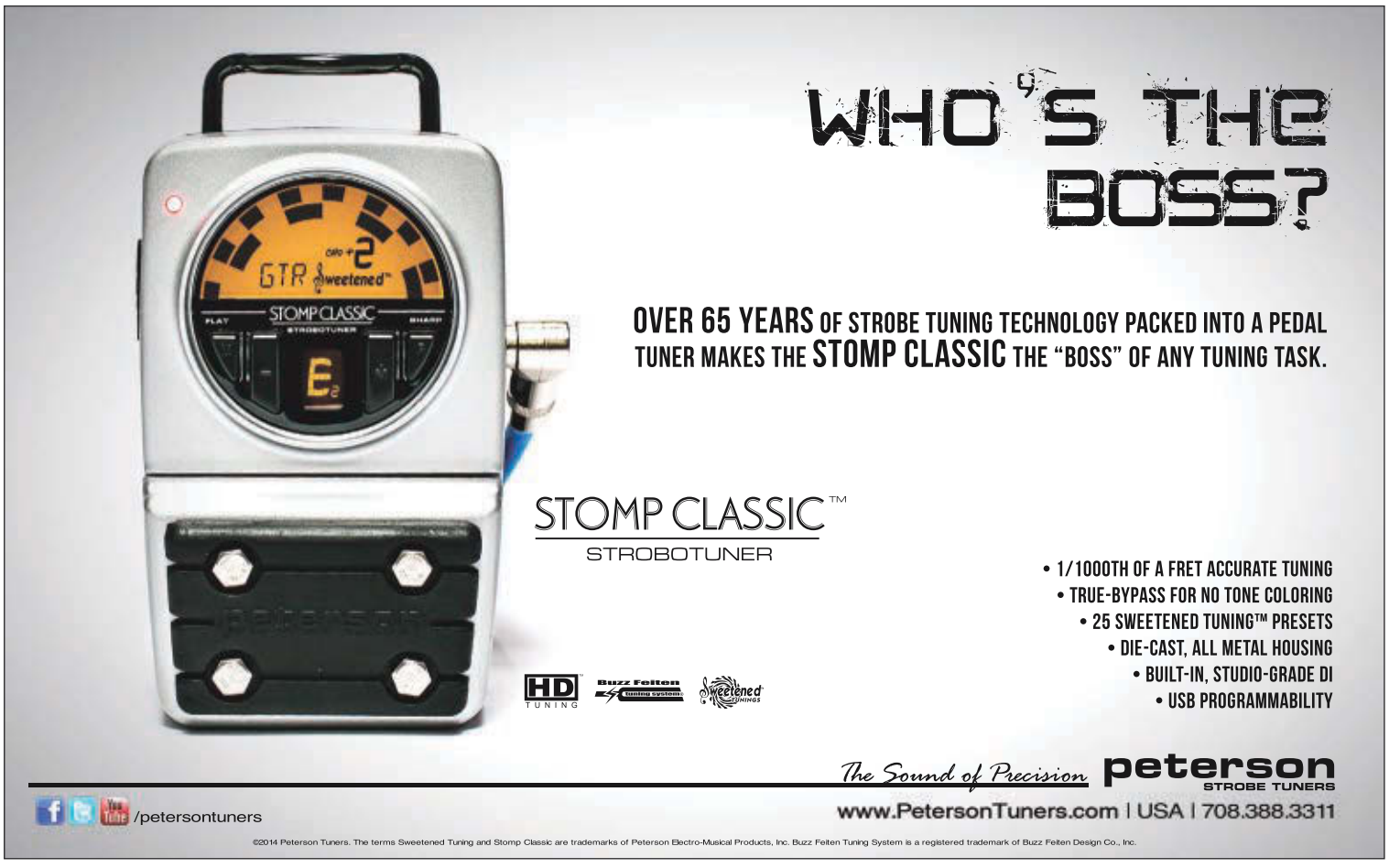
East: How did you hook up with Billy Gibbons for "Get Out of My Life Woman?"

Lee: Billy is such a personable guy. I had my engineer coming over to work on something else for the album, and the phone rang and I heard, "It's Gibbons. I'm in town." The funny thing is that morning I woke up with that song in my head, and I was singing it to my wife. When the phone rang I was still thinking about the song and I said, "Billy, what are you doing tonight? You want to come over and sing this song?" He said, "I got a terrible cold. So we better record it before it goes away." [*Laughs.*] I know a lot of divas, and I'm not used to singers saying those words. So I called up Shawn Pelton and asked him to put down a groove for us to play over. I sang him a quick beat and asked for a little loop. He says, "I'm going into a yoga class right now, but I'll have it for you in two hours." He not only remembered the tempo, but also the beat. I had to chop it up a little bit because I wrote this three-bar section at the end for cats to blow on, because I already had it in mind to ask Allen Toussaint to play on it. It worked out really nice. In fact, Shawn, being the great musician that he is, heard what we'd done and wanted to replace the drum track. He did a new track, but it wasn't nearly as groovy as the first thing he did, so we kept the chopped-up version and stuck in a few new fills. When you're following a drummer, he's leading the groove, but when he's following the groove, it just doesn't have the same meat or impetus. He's no long driving the bus.

East: Did you use an amp on your record or just a DI?

Lee: It depends on the session. I've never been a huge fan of using an amp in the studio. I almost didn't really care what kind of amp was hanging around the studio. There's a song called "Papounet's Ride," which is a chop-buster of a tune that I still can't play yet. It's like a handful of notes and harmonics—a little "bass invention" kind of thing. And in order to get those harmonics and the notes out in one pass, I had to find a way to bring out everything. I used a miniature version of an Ampeg SVT that I use in my studio for practicing and testing basses and stuff, because when you put all the knobs at noon it has a pretty honest sound.

East: I actually prefer just the direct sound and basically the shortest signal path. One cable to the DI. I have this great Radial Firefly DI, and it's fantastic. The reason I got it is because it has two inputs, and you can adjust the volume for each, so I had the upright on one and the electric on the other. It's a full tube DI,



and I absolutely love the way it sounds. I had to go direct, and if it ain't broke, let's keep going. Normally, I choose not to use an amp just to get the sound right.

East: At one point I was really fiddly about DIs, and I always had to lug some big DI around. But it's not the toys—it's the noise.

Lee: There was an album by Donald Fagen a couple of years ago called *Morph the Cat*. The first thing you heard was Freddie Washington's bass playing really out in the open, and it was just the most delicious bass sound. I said, "That's the shit right there!" I asked Elliot Scheiner, the engineer on the record, "Man, can you tell me how you got that bass sound?" He just said, "Tape," and then he kind of walked away. I said, "Aw, come back here!" But that's all I could get out of him, and I think I know what he meant, you know? In his mind, that was the answer. So there's still room for the digital world to catch up on certain aspects of what makes a good bass sound. Ever heard of a thing called Graham Central Station?

East: [*Laughs.*] That was the first one! My phone was blasting off the hook when that came out. I think Larry Graham and Jaco were the two guys that messed up bass players the most.

Lee: Quite possibly, yes. I was also fascinated by Chuck Rainey, and still am.

East: Me too.

Lee: Chuck Rainey, on a Precision bass, of course. Sometimes you have to add the drummer to the mix—especially if it's Bernard Purdie. There was a thing that happened with him that I tried to emulate, and still do. It's just a matter of your forefinger and middle finger. Either one, actually—he's almost a one-finger guy. Rubbing across the string really lightly allows the bass to sing in a beautiful way. And when the finger comes back to get ready to play the next note, it stops the note that's ringing and gives it a really cool percussive sound, almost like a stone bouncing across water. It's just such a beautiful sound when it gets recorded on tape. I go through contortions trying to get that happening with my big two fingers pounding the hell out of the bass. I think I do a good impression, but it takes me a lot more work to get there. He was effortless. Pure genius.

East: It's amazing.

Lee: Man, there are so many great bass tones. I just love when you can hear the wood. It's funny—with basses it's all about that piece of wood and that electronic circuit.

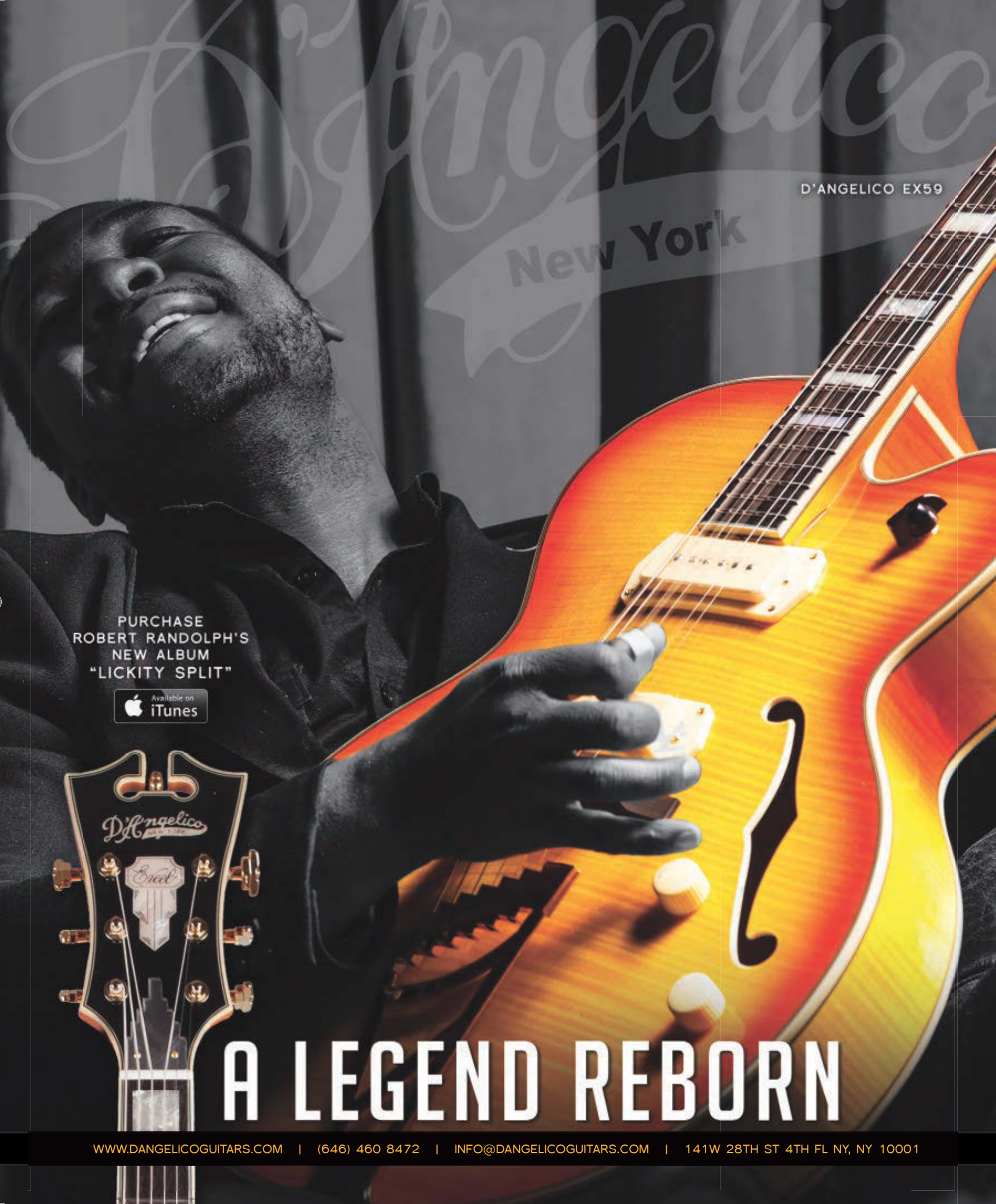
East: And the spirit of the guy who's holding it! For years you go into a studio and just plug into whatever they have, and it still sounds like you.

Lee: It still sounds like a bass, right?

YOUTUBE IT

Drummer Takanori Niida leads a funky quartet that features Will plus one of his longtime collborators, guitarist Oz Noy. Check out the finger-busting groove of "Confidence Cat" at 2:55.
YouTube search term: The Takanori Niida Quartet feat.Will Lee,Oz Noy and Tomo Fujita Part 1

Nathan and guitarist Chuck Loeb combine contrapuntal phrases with a playful groove on Fourplay's "Bali Run" from the 2011 Java Jazz Festival.
YouTube search term: Fourplay "Bali Run" Live at Java Jazz Festival 2011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Mic Makes Right

BY JOE GORE

Recording guitars is an awful lot like playing them: You can learn the basics in a ridiculously short time, but still feel like a dunce after decades of practice.

I've worn the studio dunce cap more often than I care to admit. But I've been privileged to record with some of the world's greatest producers and engineers, and to interview hundreds more. In this new recording column I'll share techniques I've pilfered from them, plus some I've blundered into on my own. We'll cover electric and acoustic … analog and digital … guitar-specific techniques and general studio skills.

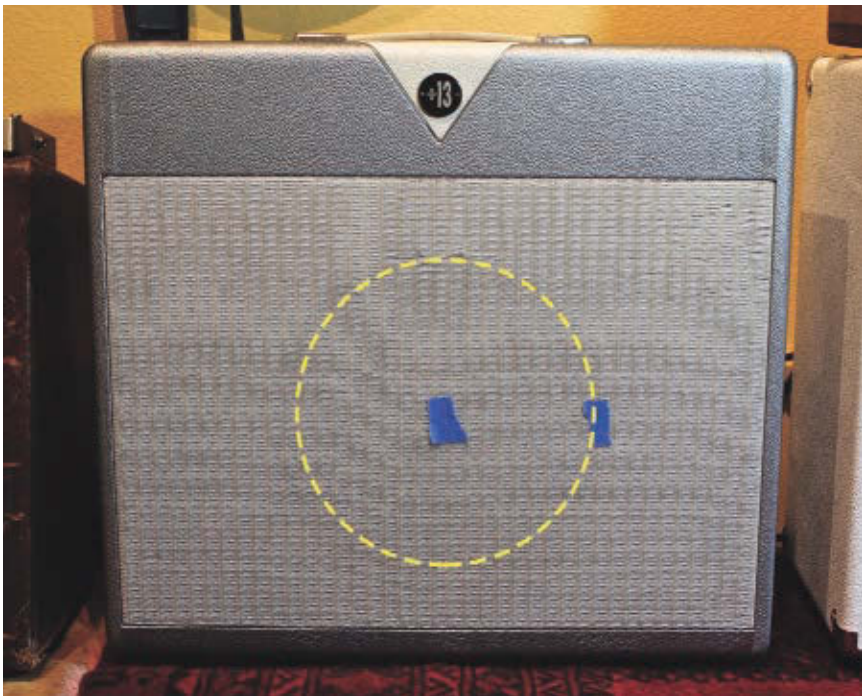
But please help make this a conversation, not a lecture. Share your experiences, hurl comments and questions, request topics, and (pretty please!) divulge your secret tricks.

I like mic. Let's start with guitar amp miking techniques. I recall a conversation with producer/guitarist/genius guy Daniel Lanois about analog sound vs. digital. At one point he stopped mid-sentence. "Look," he said, indicating two very rare and expensive microphones hanging nearby. "The difference between analog and digital is only a fraction of the difference between that mic and that one."

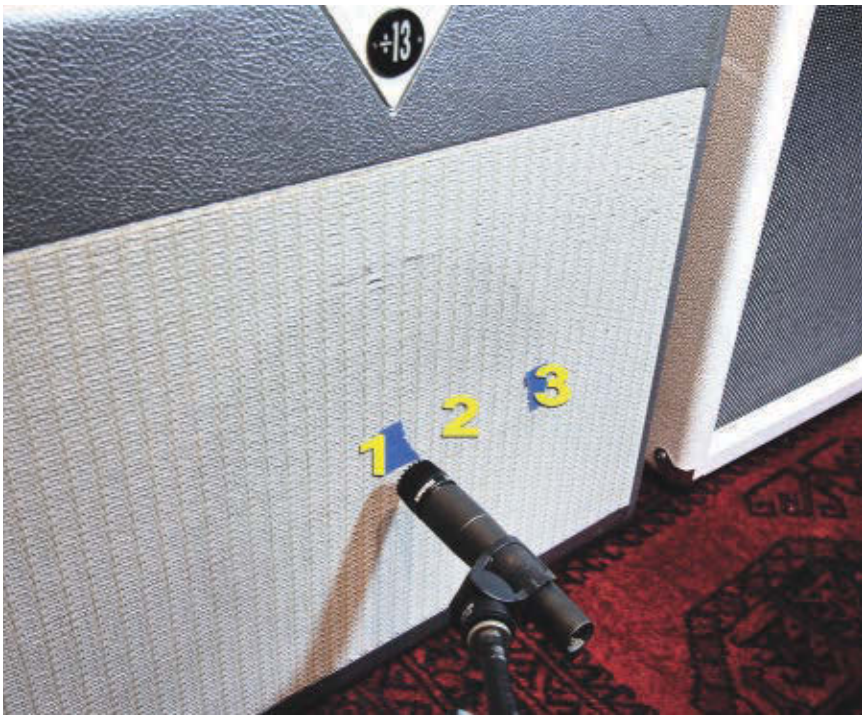
Yup, mic selection and placement are big deals. There are no "right" answers, no surefire formulas—solutions are always contextual. But it's helpful to learn how microphones *tend* to behave around speakers.

Placement = EQ. You get the brightest, most present sound with the mic aimed directly into the speaker's dust cap (the little dome at the center). The sound gets darker/warmer as you move toward the cone's edge. It doesn't matter whether you move right, left, up, or down—further from the center means less treble bite.

The distance between grille cloth and mic also matters. A very close mic provides more low-end thump. Want more *oomph*? Move the mic closer. Too



Pic 1: Mark the center and edge of your speaker with bits of painter's tape.



Pic 2: Position 1 yields a bright sound with some low-end thump. Positions 2 and 3 are progressively darker-sounding.

dark and wooly? Back it off. Beyond eight inches or so you start to pick up a lot of room sound. That can be a great thing (and a future topic). But close-miking is more idiot-proof, and it permits the most options when mixing.

Between "center vs. edge" and "near vs. far," you have a powerful 2-band tone control—and equalization of this type is invariably more organic-sounding than EQ applied after recording.

Mic check. Try this: Mark the center and edge of one of your speakers with bits of painter's tape. (If you can't discern the dust cap, shine a penlight into the grille.) Stick one tab dead center and another at the speaker's edge. [**Pic. 1.**]

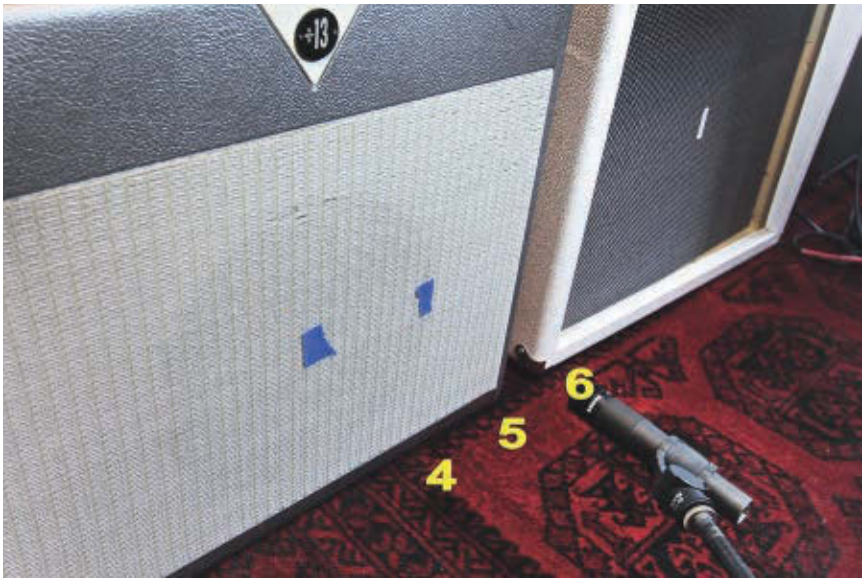
Record some guitar snippets, keeping the mic very close to the grille. Start with the mic at the center, then midway between tape marks, then at the speaker's edge. (Let's call these positions 1, 2, and 3, as shown in **Pic 2**.) Next, move the mic about eight inches from the speaker, and record center, middle, and edge examples (positions 4, 5, and 6, as seen in **Pic 3**).

(In multi-speaker cabinets, one speaker may sound superior, so listen up close. I don't need to warn you about loud levels and ear damage, do I? Keep it quiet.)

Listen back to your recordings. The drastic tone changes from position to position may astonish you. Small mic movements yield dramatic variations. Mic position can sculpt tones to suit the song, or compensate for gear that doesn't sound quite right as-is. Remember, though, that the tone you prefer in isolation might not be best in a mix. (The online version of this column includes audio examples.)

A micro-guide to mics. Here's the world's shortest description of mic properties—don't blink or you'll miss it.

Dynamic mics (examples: Shure SM57 and SM58, Sennheiser MD 421, Electro-Voice RE20) tend to provide crisp sounds with strong presence and impact, though they can be brittle at times. Condenser mics (examples: most Neumanns, the various AKG-C414 models) tend to sound smoother and less colored, if sometimes less exciting. Ribbon mics usually sound warm and smooth, with relatively soft highs (though Royer ribbon mics, such as the R-121, combine the treble snap of a dynamic with the warmth of a an old-school ribbon). The online version of this column has audio examples of the same material captured with dynamic, condenser, and ribbon mics.



Pic 3: If the tone is a bit too "woofy," back the mic off eight inches or so. Again, closer to the center means more treble.

The mic you have. Chances are you only have the luxury of agonizing over mic choice if you're lucky enough to work in studio with a well-stocked mic locker. We regular Joes and Josephinas toiling at home just go with what we've got. For many that's an SM57, because you can score one for less than $100. (There's no shame in the 57—countless classic performances were recorded with one.) It's a fine first mic, and one you'll keep using even if you expand your collection. Things get more complicated when you start blending mics—a topic we'll take up next month.

Okay, one last mic story: I got to eavesdrop in the studio while the Chili Peppers were working on *One Hot Minute*. Then-guitarist Dave Navarro was overdubbing guitars, but the engineer wasn't satisfied with the sound.

"Throw a 414 on there," suggested Dave.

The engineer squinted through the glass into the tracking room. "That *is* a 414."

"Wow," said Dave. "I had no idea there actually *was* such a thing as a 414! I just blurt that out when someone wants to change a sound because engineers always say shit like that. You learn something every day."

Dave's deadpan humor makes it hard to know when he's kidding, though I'm pretty sure he was. But the "learn something every day" part? No joke!

So what are some of your hard-won lessons about microphones and electric guitars? Send them to joegore@premierguitar.com.

JOE GORE *has recorded and performed with Tom Waits, PJ Harvey, Tracy Chapman, Courtney Love, Marianne Faithfull, Les Claypool, Flea, DJ Shadow, John Cale, and many other artists. Joe has written thousands of articles about music and helps develop music tools for Apple and other clients. He blogs at tonefiend.com.*

LEE RITENOUR'S Six String THEORY 2014 COMPETITION

Advisory Board Judges:
Dave Grusin, Lee Ritenour, Alan Pasqua, Daniel Jobim, Jesse Milliner, John Beasley, Larry Goldings, Patrice Rushen, John Patitucci, Melvin Lee Davis, Nathan East, Tom Kennedy, Victor Bailey, Chris Coleman, Dave Weckl, Gary Novak, Harvey Mason, Oscar Seaton, Simon Phillips, Sonny Emory, Will Kennedy

4 INSTRUMENTS CONTESTS

Do you play Guitar, Piano, Bass or Drums?

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Registration opens Jan 15, 2014 and closes May 15, 2014

Applicants submit 2 YouTube Videos at www.sixstringtheory.com

The 4 SST winners at Crown of the Continent Guitar workshop & festival in Montana

Think you can win? Want to have your guitar, bass, piano or drums skills approved by music greats? Here's how: register 2 YouTube videos of you playing your instrument at www.sixstringtheory.com by May 15, 2014.

Legendary GRAMMY® winning guitarist/producer Lee Ritenour is hosting the 4th Bi-Annual Six String Theory Competition and is looking forward to hearing some incredible new talent. Amazing prize package worth over $600,000 includes Berklee College of Music scholarships, performing at the Montreux Jazz Festival summer 2014, Yamaha instruments and endorsements, professional recording opportunities, a shot at a Concord Records deal, professional mentoring and more!

For Guitar, applicants may register in the genres of rock, blues, jazz/fusion, acoustic, classical/flamenco and country. For Rhythm Players, any contemporary music style will be accepted including jazz, fusion, R&B, rock, blues, etc. Here's a Yamaha video of Lee Ritenour talking about the contest.

The competition debuted in 2010 with the release of Ritenour's all-star guitar recording SIX STRING THEORY and by popular demand, expanded to include bass, piano/keyboard and drums with the release of RHYTHM SESSIONS in 2012. The Six String Theory Competition has become a highly anticipated staple for aspiring musicians, providing them with professional and recording opportunities, educational scholarships, mentoring and prizes.

In commenting Lee Ritenour stated: "2014 promises to be a banner year for the growth of our competition. I look forward to working with all of these talented musicians, mentoring them and giving them the opportunity to experience what the world of a professional musician encompasses."

Karl Marino, 2012 guitar winner, with Lee Ritenour

2012 Rhythm Player Winners recording on Lee Ritenour's "Rhythm Sessions" album

The four grand prize winners (one in each instrument) will perform at the 2014 Montreux Jazz Festival as the opening band for Lee Ritenour's show and lead an after gig jam session. The Six String Theory guitar winner will also perform with Ritenour at his concert at Montreux. Additional prizes include four Berklee College of Music scholarships, Guitar finalist to record on Ritenour's forthcoming 2014 Concord album, Yamaha instruments and endorsements, professional mentoring, Crown of the Continent Guitar Workshop Scholarships + performing, D'Addario and Monster prizes and more.

Advisory Board Judges will work with Ritenour to evaluate and determine the four winners: 1 in each of the 4 instruments: guitar, bass, piano/keys and drums. Registration closes May 15, 2014 and winners will be notified on or before June 1, 2014. Check it out for your chance to win!

Video of Lee Ritenour filmed by Yamaha:
Lee Ritenour playing "Morning Glory" on the new Yamaha "L Series" guitar
Lee Ritenour discusses 2014 competition, new Yamaha "L Series" guitar and plays
Lee Ritenour discusses 2014 competition, sponsors, Advisory Board judges

PREMIER Guitar PG · YAMAHA · Berklee college of music · Montreux Jazz Festival · Blue Note TOKYO

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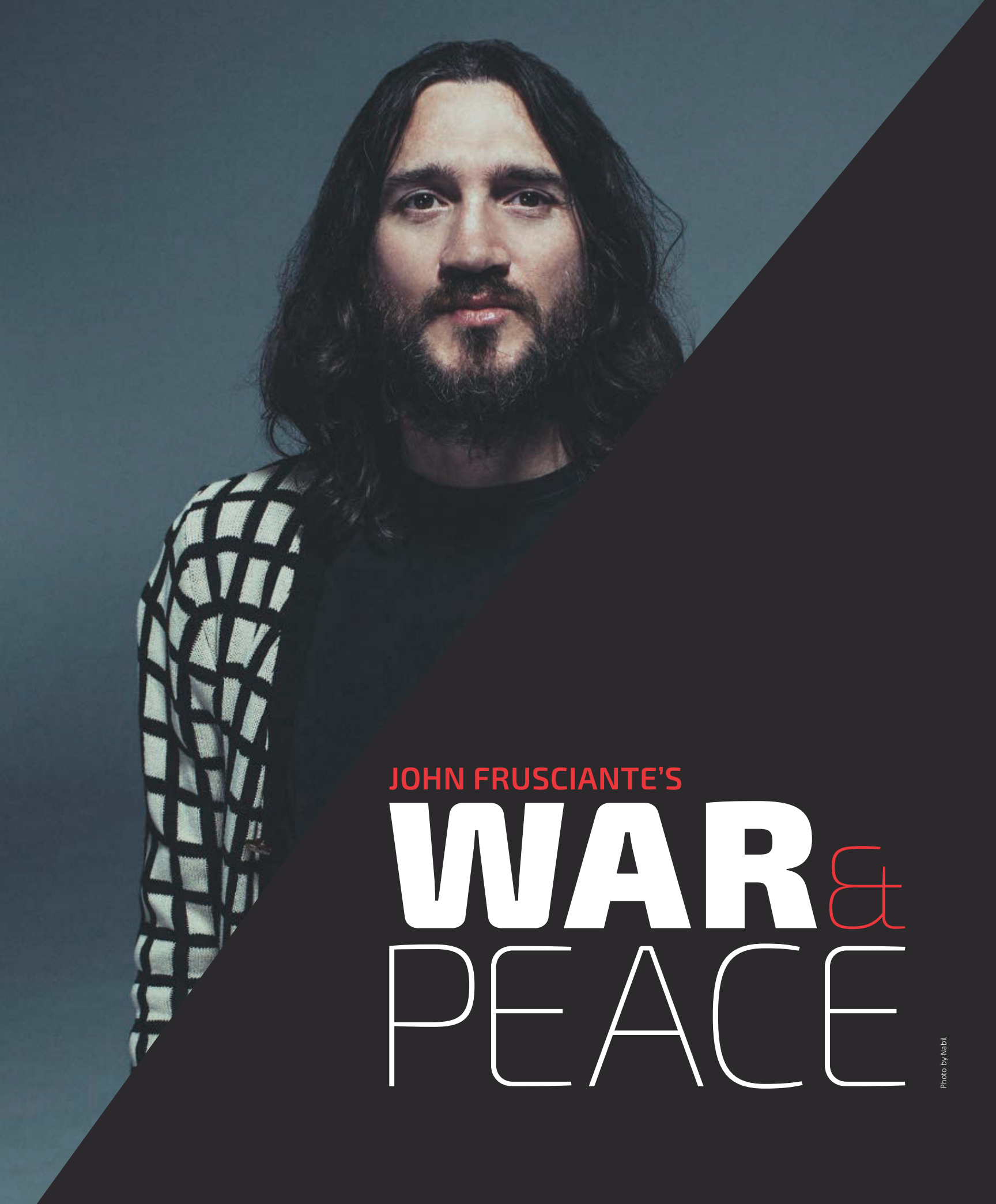
FOR CONTEST REGISTRATION & INFORMATION: WWW.SIXSTRINGTHEORY.COM



JOHN FRUSCIANTE'S

WAR & PEACE

Photo by Nabil

THE FORMER RED HOT CHILI PEPPER OPENS UP ABOUT HIS UNDER-THE-RADAR MUSICAL JOURNEY, WHY HE TRADED HIS STRAT FOR A YAMAHA SG2000, AND ACHIEVING ARTISTIC FREEDOM VIA ELECTRONICA.

BY TESSA JEFFERS

There's a battle being waged in John Frusciante's mind. In his musical world of juxtapositions and genre marriages, the traditional spars with the far-out, and mathematical equations somehow compute into expressions of feeling. The guitar will always be a bedrock instrument for the former Red Hot Chili Pepper, but his new weapons of choice are machines. "The Roland MC-202 [an early-'80s synthesizer/sequencer] is one of my favorite instruments," he says. "The same goes for drum machines, samplers, the computer, and other synthesizers."

For Frusciante, the main appeal of these instruments is that once you learn to manipulate them, you can produce all types of instrumental sounds instantly. Frusciante actually has *six* MC-202s, which he uses in various combinations to translate guitar parts into synthesized parts. With multiple machines, he can manipulate a single guitar string per machine, and then endlessly refine each string's sound.

"At this point I'm as fluent in programming as I am on guitar," he says. "Since I've learned the language and integrated it with my natural tendencies as a musician, it sometimes feels like I'm a commander in a war. Like there's fu**ed-up shit going on, and I have to fix it. Like there are two sides arguing, and one side has to win and one side has to lose. One side has to be captured and enslaved to the other side. In some ways it's probably not that different from playing a war video game. I read books about subjects like war because they remind me of how I think when I make music."

Frusciante emphasizes the fact that programmed instruments are "obedient to the mind"— a composer's most important instrument. He now feels there are no physical obstacles between the music in his imagination and the sounds he creates. He says he's equally inspired by 20th-century classical composers such as Igor Stravinsky and Iannis Xenakis, and more recent electronic experimentalists like Tom "Squarepusher" Jenkinson, who is both a classical bass virtuoso and a master programmer.

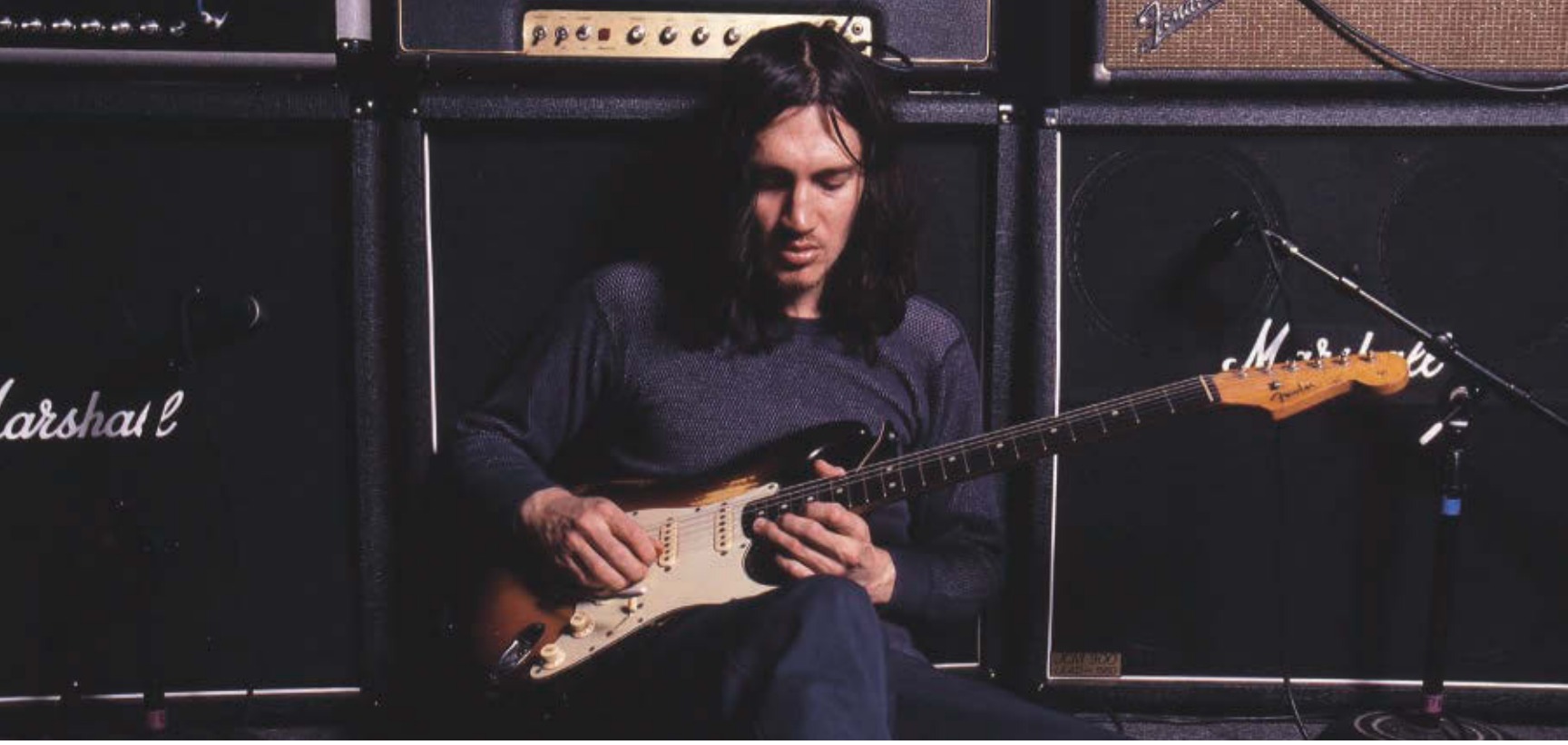
Frusciante says he was introduced to electronic music when he formed Speed Dealer Moms, an "experimental acid house" group, with friends Aaron Funk and Chris McDonald. Six years later, Frusciante has released *Enclosure*, his 11th solo album, which relies heavily on programming. He views it as a personal musical breakthrough, a marriage of intricate guitar compositions and the electronica knowledge he acquired while creating prior albums like *The Empyrean* and *PBX Funicular Intaglio Zone*.

"It's a great time to be a musician," says the prolific Frusciante. He tells *Premier Guitar* why he feels so strongly about that while candidly describing his recent music-making process.

Can you tell us how you fell in love with guitar and why you wanted to play?
When I was a little kid, it seemed clear that if I learned how to play an instrument, I'd be able to play the music I heard in my head, music I'd never heard in the real world. My parents wouldn't get me an electric guitar, though. I tried to start playing when I was 7, but I thought acoustic was boring—it wasn't the sound that I wanted to hear. I managed to get an electric guitar when I was 12. As a little kid in Santa Monica, Led Zeppelin and Kiss were the big things. I would hear Jimmy Page and wonder how a person's hands could get those sounds. Guitar for me has always been about the *sound* of the instrument, not the physicality. Physicality is just this thing between your imagination and the sound that comes out.

Is expression the same for you on all instruments? Or is guitar a special tool?
The guitar is the best way for me to study other people's music. Since I started playing, I've probably spent more time learning off records than doing any other activity in life. Doing that has so many values, among them the ability to think about music in intellectual terms. Not just hearing what you like and enjoy, but analyzing it and getting inside the heads of the people who played or wrote it. I like learning all the parts of a piece of music so I really know why I feel what I feel in the best terms that my mind is capable of understanding. I like to play one of the parts, but be able to visualize the rest of the parts and think about their relationship to each other in terms of intervals and rhythmic spaces.

In a statement attached to your *Outsides* EP, you said, "Rock music is electronic music." What did you mean?
Traditional musicians have this prejudice that if someone's not physically doing something you can see, then they aren't a legitimate musician. That's just ignorance. In the years 1500, 1600, 1700, or 1800, those at the top of the musical hierarchy were composers. And composers weren't doing anything that people would gawk



John Frusciante with his favorite '62 Strat at a rehearsal in 1999. He switched to playing Yamaha SG2000s and SG1500s in 2010, but says this Strat is always lying at the ready in his living room.

at—they thought of music in their minds and had tools at their disposal to create it, the most powerful tool being music notation. Instrumentalists served at the pleasure of the composer. They were not like lead guitarists today. A great violinist was somebody who performed the music of great composers, and if they stood out for having particularly expressive technique, they might be featured in a concerto or something. Traditional musicians get lost in thinking that the physicality of an instrument has some inherent value unto itself.

You're a technically gifted guitarist—but would you say you're more of a "gut" player?

When I was growing up I had a guitar teacher who told me that because I couldn't play scales picking every note fast, I wasn't a good guitarist. I think that attitude is wrong. For one thing, I don't think picking every note sounds very good. I know from chopping up samples that the beginning of a guitar note is the sound of the pick, and it lasts a pretty long time. If you pick every note and play very fast, you hear what people like Yngwie sound like. I love Yngwie's playing, but it's not the greatest *sound* to be picking every note, because you hear

THE NEW STYLE

John Frusciante is pumped up about a project he just wrapped with the Black Knights, a hip-hop duo featuring Wu-Tang affiliates Crisis the Sharpshoota and Rugged Monk. At first it was just friends hanging out and rapping over beats, but eventually the songs grew into a trilogy of albums (to be released at six-month intervals) and a new way for Frusciante to make music socially. He created the soundscapes for the Black Knights' lyrics.

"I discovered a new type of band/collaboration where no one gives or receives orders," says Frusciante. "It's really fun, and I'm as free as when I'm working alone. We have arguments all the time, but they take place within the music."

The first of these albums, *Medieval Chamber*, appeared in January, and was made at the same time as *Enclosure*. "As different sounding as they are, both albums follow one train of investigative creative thought, and what I was learning from one, I was applying to the other," says Frusciante. According to Crisis, *Medieval Chamber* represents the musicians getting to know each other musically, but the trio really hits its stride with the second album, *The Almighty* (due this summer).

"John is so musically inclined," says Crisis. "I learn something every time we hang out on the music tip. It's like rapping with a band. All his beats really have feeling, and that's what's missing from hip-hop right now. It's easy to catch a concept from them, too."

Frusciante produces, plays guitar, and uses his own vocals as samples. Says Crisis: "John puts beats together beautifully. He engineers the session, cleans it up, and gives it its own feel and own world beautifully. He plays the guitar beautifully. He sings beautifully. Whatever he brings to the table, we're all for it!"

Photo by Neil Zlozower/Atlas Icons

more of the pick attack than the sound of the note. Allan Holdsworth doesn't pick every note, and I consider it a more expressive way to play fast. There's more tonal variety. There's more room for expression. In the '80s, guitarists thought that because somebody played cleanly, or could pick every note fast, or do a lot of fancy tricks, that made them a good guitar player. Guitar playing got lost on that road to a certain degree. It's not as if being studious and practicing are not advantageous for a guitar player—they are! But the goals are to see the instrument clearly in your mind, produce beautiful music, and express something.

I remember when I made the transition to following my heart: I was listening to the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil" solo, and I thought, "This is good guitar playing." In no way is something by Steve Vai better just because he does fancier things or because his muscles are stronger. This music coming out of this guitar is as good as music can be.

Television's *Marquee Moon* album gave me a similar feeling. They weren't particularly muscular players, but it's a very guitar-oriented record. There's lots of soloing, and it's beautiful music. I realized that I didn't have to put so much intention into my playing, and that I didn't have to make impressing the listener such a focal point of my practicing and performing. That's the reason I played the way that I did on *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* and my first solo album. I was specifically *not* trying to be impressive, but to command the relationship between my imagination and the instrument.

How did you conceptually select songs for *Enclosure*?

My object was not to feature my songs, but to use the songs as a place to express myself sonically and rhythmically, with the drums as the primary instrument—more so than the melody. That's really the change that's taken place in the last 30 years in electronic-based forms of music. Drums have moved to the top of the hierarchy of musical elements, and typical chord changes or other elements aren't a necessity in making music. In some ways I can go farther out than I'd be able to go if I didn't have a song beneath me. For instance, the stuff I've done with chopping up jazz drum solos, doing drums that are in time with the song on certain accents and off time on other hits. I haven't heard anybody go that far with sampling and chopping up off-time drums.

Like on "Crowded"?

Yeah, for sure. I'm particularly proud of that song. I felt like I'd reached my peak.

So some of those drums sound live, but aren't?

No, they're chopped-up breakbeats, where you take a recording of something like the famous "amen break" and chop it into as many pieces as possible. It's just like slicing tape, only you're able to cut much more precisely. Rearranging the order, changing

the speed, changing the sound—it's an area of expression absolutely equal to playing an instrument. Composers have never had the opportunity to be so detailed with rhythm. People working with tape could never edit with such rhythmic precision. It's an incredible thing to be able to do. God, if I would have known how to do this when I was a teenager, I would've been so happy!

But it's probably not easy for everyone to grasp! It sounds complex.

It's just like anything else: You practice for about five years, and it's not hard anymore. Your mind starts forming a sense of groove. For a traditional musician, groove is something you feel, not something you think about. Boy, the struggles people have with teaching people how to have better groove—it's like they don't have the language for it. I have my own numerical form of theory, and I could never stop learning from it. As much as there will always be things for me to figure out on my guitar off of CDs, there will always be things to study on the computer when it comes to groove and programming and being fully conscious of the degrees of "off-timeness." That's what groove is: varying degrees of off-timeness and varying degrees of accent and non-accent. There's just tons to study there.

Speaking of "off-timeness," you have a knack for creating tension—like when you sing against the tempo of your songs. How do you approach this?

For *Enclosure*, the vocals were recorded before the instrumentation was complete. I'd start a song by programming a really simple one- or two-bar drum-machine thing, just a steady guide to sing and play guitar to. That could have been a problem, because normally people sing to fit the atmosphere that's there, and if there's only a guitar and a simple drum machine they'd tend to sing timidly. I learned not to do that. That initial vocal take you hear on the record is me giving my all.

There's still a lot of guitar on this album. Do you use rhythm guitar as a tracking guide before laying down other parts?

Yes, I'd record the guitar as a basis for everything else, but then I'd think purely in terms of sonic composition and try to move *away* from the initial concept.

What are you doing with the guitar parts on "Cinch"? It's basically a six-minute guitar solo.

I was most interested in learning to see the guitar more like a piano player sees a keyboard. Certain things that come naturally to keyboardists don't come naturally to guitarists. Inverting chords is really easy on piano, because the notes look the same in every register, but on guitar you need to work in various positions on various areas of the neck. For instance, one of my favorite musicians is Tony Banks, the keyboard player from Genesis. I've loved his music my whole life, but I couldn't write chord progressions like the things he did on *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* and *Foxtrot*. It was mysterious to me because I had a deep emotional connection to the music, but I couldn't learn it on guitar. I definitely couldn't write things along those lines! It's basically this

swift ability to be able to modulate, to shift from one key or mode to another in the midst of a chord progression. I was stuck writing chord progressions that shared the same seven notes, like Am–C–G–F–Em. If you move to D major, something has shifted—what was F is now F#. That can be inconvenient when you're soloing, because you're liable to make mistakes and make an idiot of yourself.

One of my rules was to not use the low strings as a guide to what key I'm in, like "B minor equals 7th fret, G minor equals 3rd fret." In songs like "Cinch," there's a modulation on almost every chord. But just because my tonal center changes doesn't mean I have to move to a different fret. When I was in the Chili Peppers, I made the chord changes I soloed over easy so I didn't have to keep switching keys. Now I do the opposite.

What guitars did you use on *Enclosure*?

My main guitars are Yamaha SG2000s. My favorite is a purple one from 1980. I have a few others, and a few SG1500s. I switched from the Strat to the Yamahas in late 2010. I've played the Strat maybe once in the last three years, on one little recording.

Why did you switch?

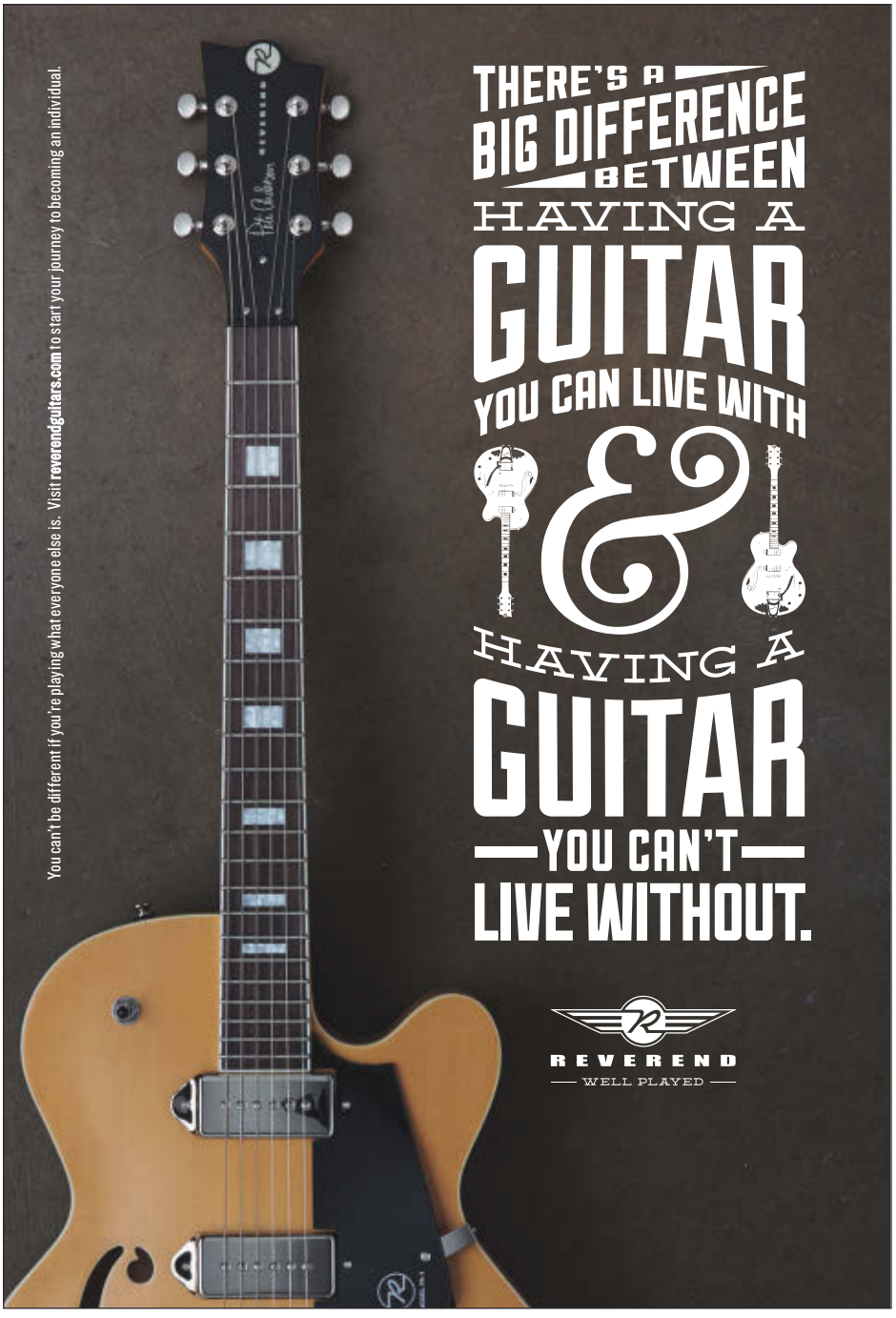
A guitar makes you play a certain way. A person who studies Jimi Hendrix's playing with a Les Paul is at a disadvantage—you won't really understand what he was doing with his hands. The way the instrument's harmonics respond to the movement doesn't have anything in common with what you hear on the record. A [Yamaha] SG is a lot like a Les Paul—it has a similar sound and responds to the hands in a similar way. It was an opportunity to change my style. I was looking for a way to have a new approach to the guitar, and at one point I thought of not using a pick. But the problem with that was that I couldn't play along with records, because only two guitarists I like play without a pick.

Who?

Lindsey Buckingham from Fleetwood Mac, and Jeff Beck, who apparently hasn't used a pick in 20 years. Those guys get such a wide range of sounds, but it would be impossible for me, because I don't practice by playing in bands, but by playing along with records. I'm sure those guys could play along with anybody, but it would've taken me years to be able to do that. So I bought an SG, because I'm a big fan of John McGeoch from Siouxsie and the Banshees and Magazine. When I'd play along with his records using a Strat, the parts sounded too thin and weak for the simple power of his playing. In learning the SG, I had to teach myself to bend in a brand-new way and use new muscles to do vibrato. Everything had to change. I felt totally incapable on the guitar—it lowered my technique significantly. Where I could pick up a Strat and attack it, I couldn't do anything with the SG.

Is one of those subtle guitar parts on "Fanfare" a bass?

I play a Fender Bass VI on that song—and a Strat, I think. The Bass VI is a bass that feels like a guitar. The strings aren't wide apart, and it has a guitar-like sound



compared to a bass. You can play open chords—anything you can play on guitar sounds nice on it. The "Fanfare" guitar part is very basic chord progressions compared to most of the stuff that I do. But playing the same stuff that I played on the Strat on the Bass VI gave it a weightier sound that made it harder for my ears to decipher exactly what chords I was hearing. You're not used to hearing those chords an octave lower.

Do you have a pedalboard in your studio right now?

No. If I want to change the sound of the guitar, I do it with the modular synthesizer. When I record, I just want to get the best pure guitar sound I can. Later, I decide whether to put some room on it, or put it through the synthesizer, or treat it with the computer in some way.

So are you using any traditional pedals?

Occasionally, I use an Electro-Harmonix Electric Mistress or maybe a chorus pedal. Let me see … [*opens drawer*] I have nice drawers with all my effects in them, but I hardly ever use them. With the Strat I had to use a distortion, but with the Yahama SG I don't need a pedal because the amp gives me plenty of distortion. With Marshalls and a Strat, you need a distortion pedal. I use a chorus or flanger if I want a thin sound or some entertaining movement. Treating guitar with the modular [synth] after using chorus is also a nice sound.

What makes for an exciting guitar player?

Somebody who's not conscious only of themself, but of the spatial relationships between themself and the other musicians. Someone who covers their own area sonically, rhythmically, and in terms of pitch. You can have that whether you play in an advanced style or a pretty basic one. There are great guitar players—like Matthew Ashman from Bow Wow Wow—who provide "land" that the other musicians run on and drive on and do all the stuff they do. That's the part of guitar playing that gets overlooked by guitarists who get obsessed with technique: using the instrument to create a bed or an atmosphere for the other instruments. Steve Hackett was really great at creating guitar atmospheres that fit perfectly in the midst of Genesis' music. And like most guitarists, I find it exciting to hear somebody going out on a limb, taking risks, and pushing themself.

> "A guitar makes you play a certain way. A person who studies Jimi Hendrix's playing with a Les Paul is at a disadvantage—you won't really understand what he was doing with his hands. The way the instrument's harmonics respond to the movement doesn't have anything in common with what you hear on the record."

JOHN FRUSCIANTE'S GEAR

GUITARS

Yamaha SG2000s
Yamaha SG1500s
Ibanez Artist
Fender Bass VI
'62 Fender Stratocaster

AMP

Marshall Jubilee head

OTHER GEAR

Six Roland MC-202s
Roland 100-M
Roland TR-606
Roland GR-500
Roland GR-300
Tap Audio modular synthesizer
Synton Fenix modular synthesizer
Elektron Monomachine
Various vintage drum machines
Four Mackie mixers
Neve console
Electro-Harmonix Stereo Electric Mistress flanger/chorus
Pyramid light-gauge strings
Dunlop Tortex .60 mm picks

Have you met anyone who's doing what you're doing?

Everything I've learned on these electronic instruments, I had the honor of learning from Aaron Funk, who goes by the name Venetian Snares. He's not a traditional musician, but he uses a lot of the same gear I use. Along with our friend Chris [McDonald], we used to get together three or four times a year,

starting in 2008. We'd live together for two weeks at a time, basically doing nothing but drinking beer and making music. But I don't know anybody who's both a traditional and electronic musician, except maybe Squarepusher.

Have the things you've wanted to say as a musician changed over the years?

It was always about making music that I had a thirst for—not entertaining or being popular. I let the world decide whether or not what I did would yield money. I fell in with very ambitious people and I felt like I had to coordinate my musical thinking with theirs, because they really had a drive to be popular. When I joined the Chili Peppers, they were playing clubs and selling 80,000 records. I thought they would never be any bigger, and I was shocked when I found out that they wanted to be. In a band like that, you have to compromise a lot and spend a lot of time doing things you don't want to do, like promoting and touring the world for years.

The first time I was in the band I was confused by all that, but by the second time I had it clear in my head who they were, who I was, and how the two things could work together. The answer was for me to spend as much time as possible practicing guitar and using the leisure time to write songs and record music. When we did *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, I started working on the 4-track, making music specifically for me in order to stay sane.

What was your favorite part about making *Enclosure*?

I guess just the feeling that I'm always discovering something. That's what makes me want to do music in the first place. It just feels good when you can blend different genres that seem to have been segregated from one another in history. Blending them successfully is just a joy.

I feel like there's a big message in *Enclosure*, that this is a way songwriters can express themselves without having to depend on producers or engineers or other musicians. Your job as a songwriter can be to create a sound composition in a way that traditional musicians can't conceive. They know how to play their physical instrument, but when it comes to the actual goal of being a musician—creating a sonic composition—they rely on other people to do it for them.

Around the time I was making [2009's] *Empyrean*, I'd envisioned certain things, like the idea that jungle beats and slow, Black Sabbath-type heavy metal would go really good together. I saw how really slow music and really fast drums might intersect, but I had no capability to do it. When I finally felt I'd achieved it, it felt like I'd done something. Being in the creative process is my favorite part of anything I do. I really love the act of making music.

Dialing in Maximum Tone

BY PETER THORN

Running a clean-boost pedal (like my current go-to Suhr Iso Boost) can give you an effective volume boost for solos, as long as it's set up correctly.

Guitarists have *so* many tonal options available today. I routinely see players of all sorts using sophisticated rigs that would have been out of reach to all but top-level touring pros just 10 years ago! When it comes to pedals in particular, there's a huge range to choose from and guitarists are creating sounds that have never been heard before. While there's no absolute right or wrong way to create art via guitar tones, I do hear some common mistakes made when it comes to dialing in effects pedals. So this month, we're going to talk about maximizing your effects and dialing them in for the greatest impact.

Compressors, Overdrives, Fuzzes, and Distortions

These effects share a common trait: They compress your signal. Compressors squash your transients and raise the level of sounds as they fade, creating a more even tone without adding any overdrive or distortion. Overdrives, distortions, and fuzzes clip your incoming guitar signal and add different types of grind and harmonics to the tone, but they're also compressing the signal.

A common mistake I hear guitarists and bassists make is not setting the overall volume level of these effects correctly. The overall sound can *seem* louder and more present when you turn on one of these gain boxes while playing on your own, but you might find that you get lost in the mix when playing with other musicians. You want to make sure you set the output volume of the effect so that the transients (the initial attack when you hit a note or chord) are just as loud or slightly louder as when the effect is off.

Boosts

I get a few emails each week with questions about boosts. Guitarists usually want to know how to get an overall volume boost for solos. It's a common misconception that you'll get a volume bump when engaging a clean boost pedal into an already crunchy or distorted amp. The reality is that if you run a boost into an already clipped signal, you are going to push that signal into clipping further. You'll get more overdrive and sustain, but you won't get a volume increase.

If what you want is a volume boost, there are a couple ways to achieve this. If your amp has an effects loop, run your boost pedal in the loop. If you're using other effects in the loop, run the boost *last* in your signal chain. Because the effect loop comes after the preamp (where your tone and overdrive is generated) and before the power amp (which amplifies your tone with clean power), boosting here will most definitely give you a bump in volume. You could also try using a volume pedal in the loop for volume control.

I've set up presets at practice- or home-volume levels many times, only to get to a gig or rehearsal and find that my settings are way off.

What if your amp doesn't have a loop? One thing to consider is backing off the overdrive your amp is creating and making up that drive with an overdrive pedal placed *before* a clean-boost pedal. The less your amp is distorting, the more you'll notice a volume increase when hitting it with a clean boost. Running your amp cleaner solves multiple problems because you will also be able to run effects like reverb and delay into the front end. (These effects usually sound terrible running into a distorted signal.)

Delay, Reverb, and Modulation

Setting things like feedback, mix levels of delays, and dwell levels of reverbs is best done at "real-world" levels. I've set up presets at practice- or home-volume levels many times, only to get to a gig or rehearsal and find that my settings are *way* off. When other band members are playing, it can mask things that I thought would be audible (like delay mix and trails), so more extreme settings may be required.

Another thing I've learned when running effects in a loop is that the louder I play, the more prominent the effect can seem. This becomes more of a factor for amps 50 watts and under, because the lower the power, the harder you'll drive the power amp when turning up. Setting your effects at gig levels with your performance amp will ensure that you don't get lost in a sea of delay or reverb when you least expect it!

If you've gone through the trouble of setting up (and hauling around) a stereo-effects rig, you want to make sure both sides of your stereo signal are properly represented in the PA when playing live. A soundperson will sometimes only provide one microphone for a guitar rig, and that can create headaches for guitarists that run in stereo. Your stereo ping-pong delays, panning, and undulating rotary speaker effects won't sound so hot to the audience if they're only hearing one side.

I suggest *advancing* the gig. Get in touch with the venue beforehand and provide them with a stage plot that details the inputs you and your band require. Some advance notice (and subtle persuasion at the gig) will usually get you the two mics and inputs you require so your stereo signal will be heard loud and proud. That said, my pedalboard is easily configurable in stereo or mono, so I can run mono very easily if need be.

I hope some of these suggestions will come in handy when dialing in your pedals. Until next month, happy picking!

PETER THORN
is an L.A.-based guitarist, currently touring with Melissa Etheridge. His solo album, Guitar Nerd, *is available through iTunes and cdbaby.com. Read more about his career at peterthorn.com.*

Frank Turner
& the sleeping souls

"Not a pop star. An entertainer."

The recurring theme throughtout **Frank Turner**'s fifth album is **change**. Those who have followed Turner's career since he went solo in 2005 won't be surprised. After 1,400 incendiary live shows and four acclaimed albums, last year saw the musician previously known as a punk poet become (whisper it) a sort of pop star. Turner's first single from the album, **Recovery**, sounds like a happy song, but it's clearly not. The album is about unexpected change and relationships ending. Guitarist **Ben Lloyd** uses a **Weber 10F150** in his Laney VC30.

Check out the band at **www.frank-turner.com**.
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Jason Vieaux

A CLASSICAL VIRTUOSO'S SHOW-STOPPING ENCORE

BY TEJA GERKEN

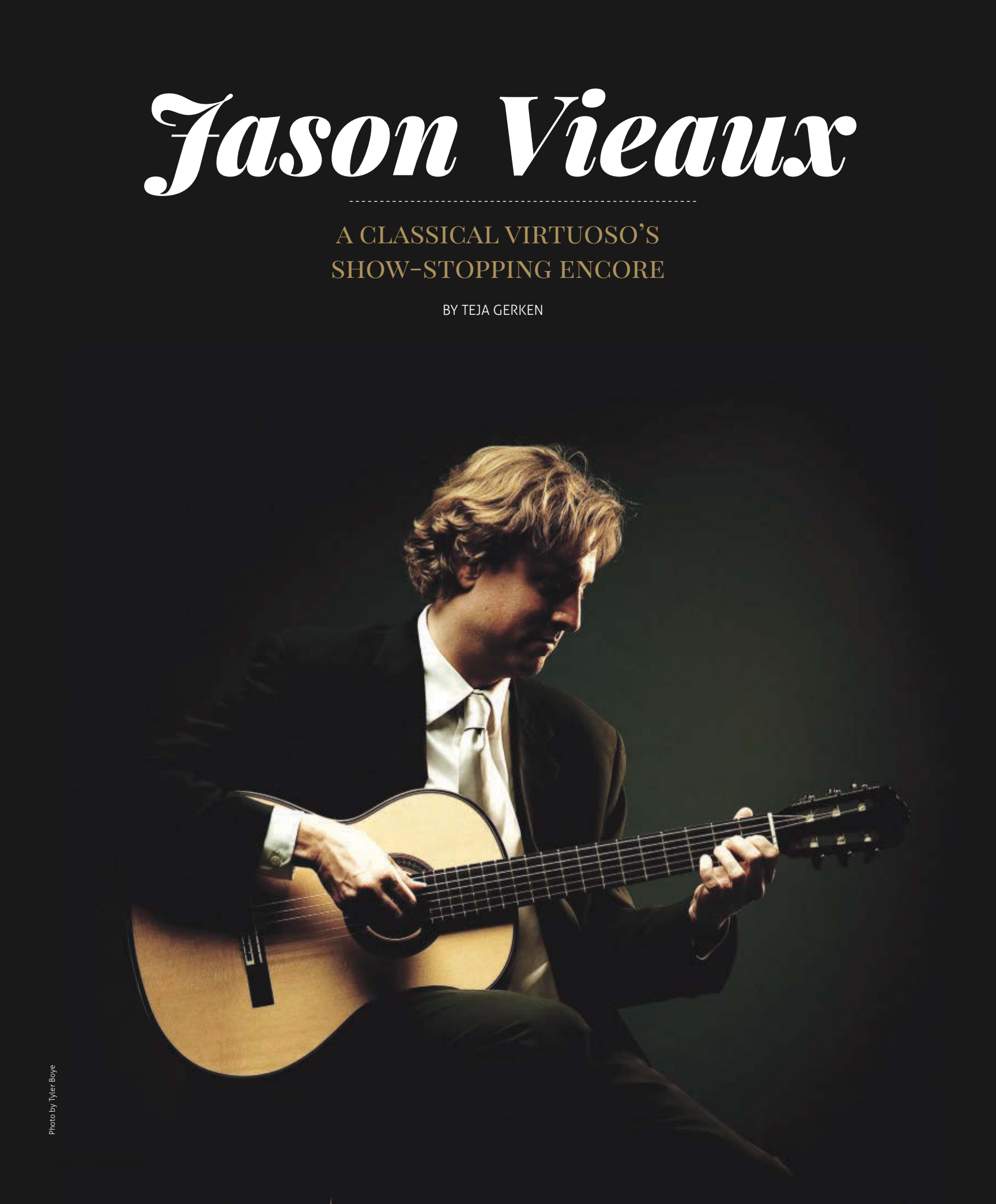

Photo by Tyler Boye

Jason Vieaux is a busy guy. He's released more than a dozen albums since 1993, he heads the guitar department at Ohio's Cleveland Institute of Music, and serves on the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. He's a member of the advisory board for the Guitar Foundation of America (GFA), and he runs an online classical guitar school through ArtistWorks. Meanwhile, Vieaux crisscrosses North America several times per year, performing solo concerts and collaborating with such artists as flutist Gary Schocker, harpist Yolanda Kondonassis, mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke, and bandoneon/accordion player Julien Labro.

Vieaux has followed a picture-book path for a classical guitarist: Growing up in Buffalo, New York, he began playing at age 7, working with private teachers until attending the Cleveland Institute of Music as a college student. In 1992 he became the youngest-ever winner of the annual GFA competition, launching a professional career that's been in high gear ever since.

Vieaux's albums include titles dedicated to works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Manuel Ponce, Astor Piazzolla, and—perhaps surprisingly for a player strongly rooted in the classical tradition—Pat Metheny. But on his just-released album *Play* (Azica Records), Vieaux takes a sort of a "greatest hits" approach to his repertoire, featuring pieces ranging from Andrés Segovia's "Estudio Sin Luz" and Francisco Tárrega's evergreen "Recuerdos de la Alhambra" to contemporary gems such as Roland Dyens' "Tango en Skai," and Andrew York's "Sunburst." Vieaux doesn't reinvent any of these, but you'd be hard pressed to find versions performed with more confidence, better tone, and a more complete understanding of the material. If you're new to classical guitar, *Play* serves as an excellent introduction to some of the genre's most popular pieces, and even if you're familiar with the material, Vieaux's virtuoso playing will keep you engaged.

Premier Guitar caught up with the 41-year old guitarist by phone just after he'd returned from performing with the North Mississippi Symphony Orchestra and just before he headed back out for a solo gig in Massachusetts. Did I mention the guy is busy?

Photo by Tyler Boye

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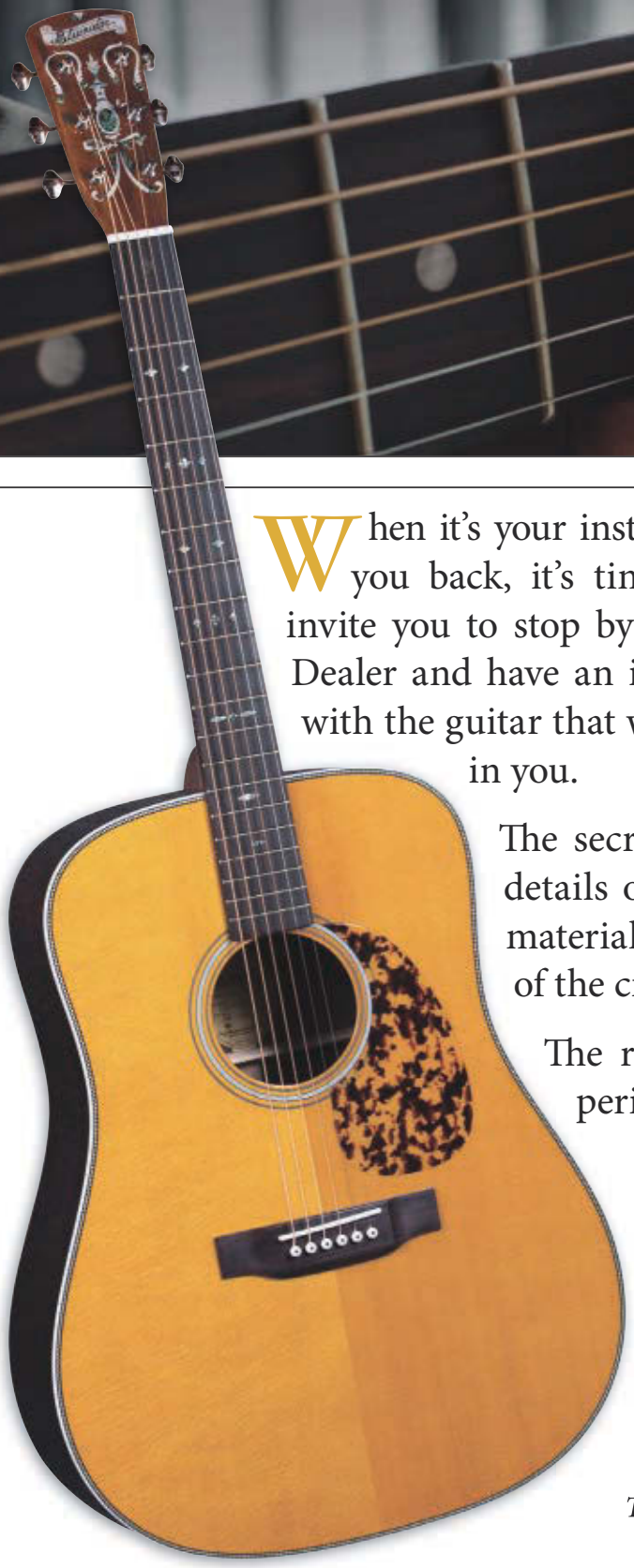

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Photo by Tyler Boye

How did *Play* came about?

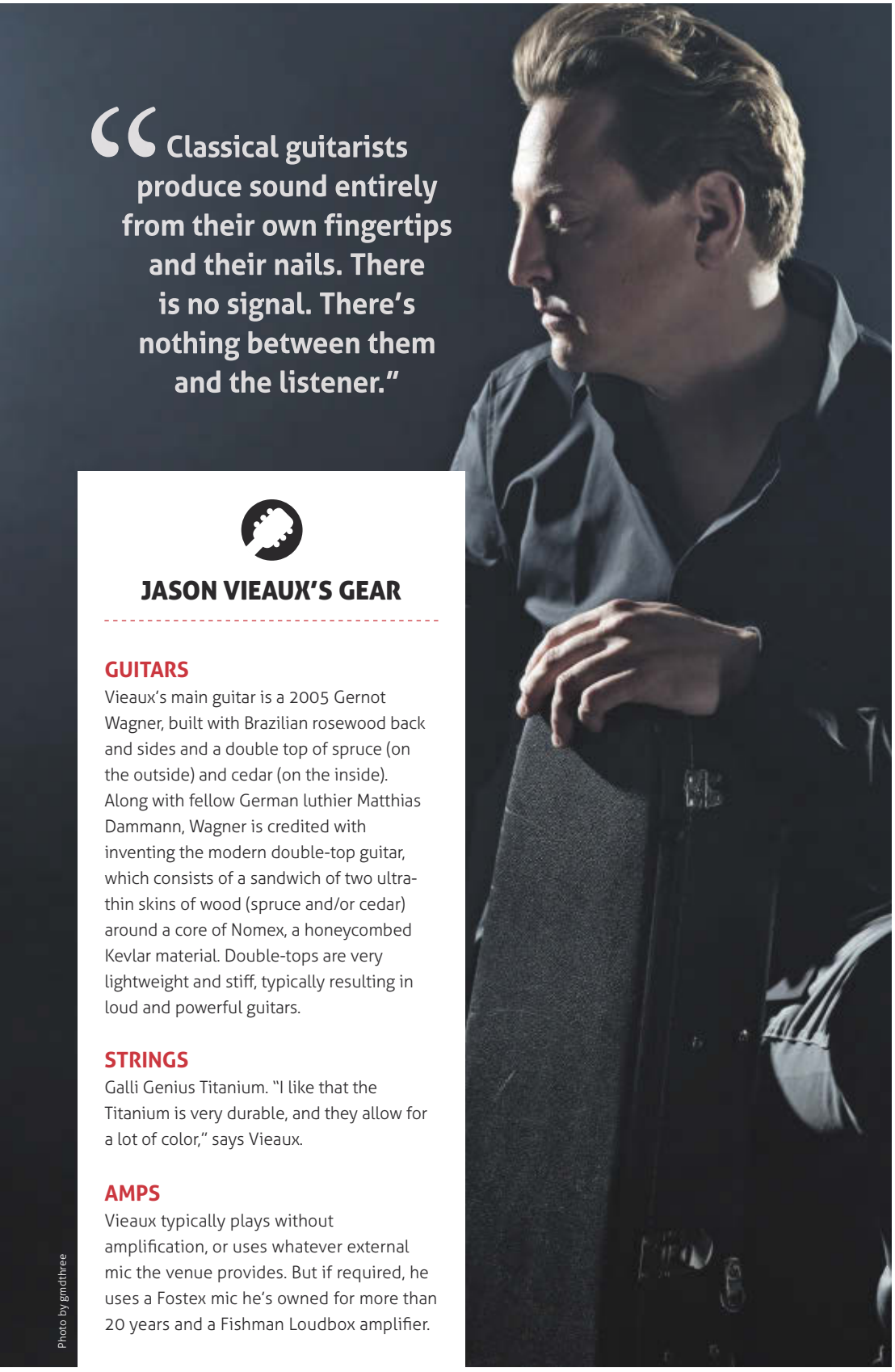
I try to alternate solo CDs with collaborative projects. It became that time to make another solo CD, and although I'd eventually like to do another Bach CD, I realized that I was coming up on my 20th anniversary as a professional player, and it just felt right to put together more of a fun project, where I would just play crowd-pleasers, things that the audiences know really well. I've done so many concerto gigs with orchestras where I would play an encore like "Recuerdos de la Alhambra," or "Capricho Arabe," and the audiences would always ask, "Do you have that on a CD?" And so all those encore pieces, the ones people really respond to, are on the CD.

How did you choose the pieces?

Half are things that I've played, either as encores or in all-Spanish or all-Latin American recitals, and half are pieces that I've always loved but never gotten around to playing, like [Paulo Bellinati's] "Jongo" or the theme from *The Deer Hunter*, "Cavatina." I've always loved that piece. I used to play this as a duo with my first teacher, growing up in Buffalo, and I used to love just playing the melody. So it's a lot of pieces that I've played since I was a kid—again, sort of in celebration of 20 years on the road.

One challenge with playing popular repertoire is to make it your own. How did you approach that?

That part of it is actually not a challenge. I don't really struggle with how to make something my own. My process is to look at the score. It sounds like I'm being flip, but actually, my approach this whole time is to play the rhythm correctly—which I don't think happens all the time, even in classical guitar—and not to try to put a new, personal, spin on it, but just play the piece the way I hear it through my musical understanding. So that part is actually pretty easy. Whether I'm playing Bach or Albéniz, or even just shorter pieces like these, I try to play them the way I think the composer would like them to be heard, rather than the current approach, which is very fashionable right now



> “Classical guitarists produce sound entirely from their own fingertips and their nails. There is no signal. There’s nothing between them and the listener.”

Photo by gmdthree

JASON VIEAUX’S GEAR

GUITARS

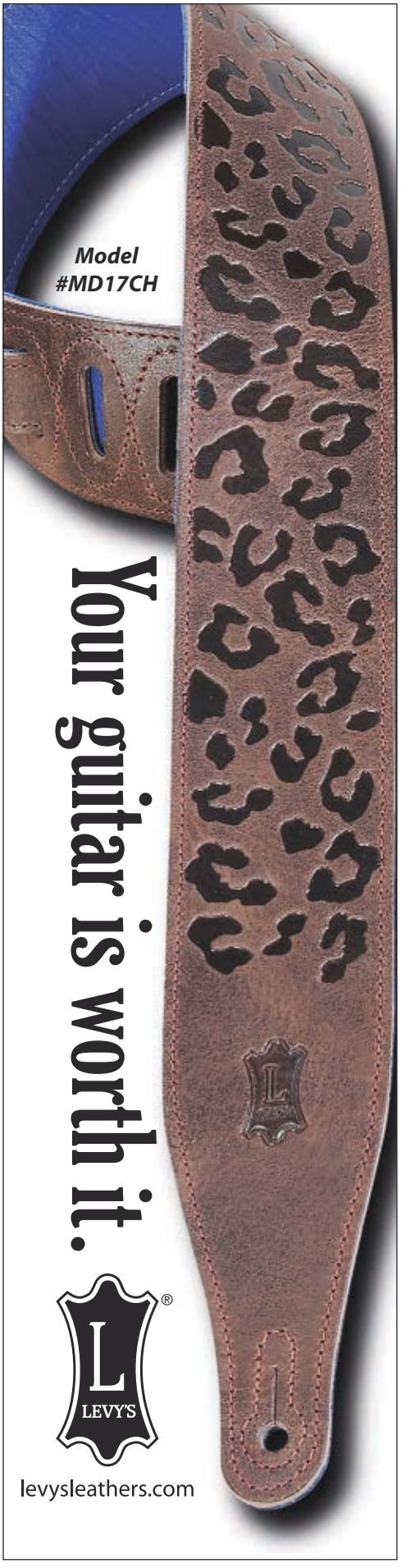
Vieaux’s main guitar is a 2005 Gernot Wagner, built with Brazilian rosewood back and sides and a double top of spruce (on the outside) and cedar (on the inside). Along with fellow German luthier Matthias Dammann, Wagner is credited with inventing the modern double-top guitar, which consists of a sandwich of two ultra-thin skins of wood (spruce and/or cedar) around a core of Nomex, a honeycombed Kevlar material. Double-tops are very lightweight and stiff, typically resulting in loud and powerful guitars.

STRINGS

Galli Genius Titanium. “I like that the Titanium is very durable, and they allow for a lot of color,” says Vieaux.

AMPS

Vieaux typically plays without amplification, or uses whatever external mic the venue provides. But if required, he uses a Fostex mic he’s owned for more than 20 years and a Fishman Loudbox amplifier.



in classical guitar, of changing rhythm or heavily distorting things. To me, that's almost a desperate move, because it suggests that these pieces need to have something done with them, and I, the performer, have to apply a personal signature. My whole thing—and what I also teach my students—is that you have to have faith in the composer, in what they wrote.

Do you have a favorite piece on the album?

It will probably change, but playing "A Felicidade" by [Antonio Carlos] Jobim, who I just think is one of the greatest songwriters of the last 100 years, is just super fun, because you can apply ghost notes and stuff like that. On the recording I try to be pretty faithful to Roland Dyens' arrangement.

Why did you chose Dyens' arrangement?

Because it's awesome! He makes a really wonderful concert guitar piece out of it. I was just knocked out by that arrangement the first time I heard Roland play it 15 years ago. But in concert I inevitably start adding more ghost notes and little subtle things, like I also do with my own Metheny arrangements. Especially in Brazilian music, you don't always have to play the same bossa nova or samba rhythm exactly the same way over and over—you can alter it like a percussionist while still keeping the beat. That's a fun thing, because you can change it every time you play it. The other one that really resonates with me is my arrangement of Duke Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood,"

YOUTUBE IT

Jason Vieaux's YouTube channel features links to several performance videos, as well as to sample lessons from his ArtistWorks online courses. This recording of his arrangement of Duke Ellington's "In a Sentimental Mood" (which is featured on Vieaux's new album, *Play*) shows his gorgeous classical tone in the context of a jazz standard. **YouTube search term:** Jason Vieaux: Duke Ellington's "In A Sentimental Mood"

Photo by Tyler Boye

because it's just such a soulful tune, and I try to play it as much as I can now.

Do you play "In A Sentimental Mood" off a score, or do you leave room for improvisation?

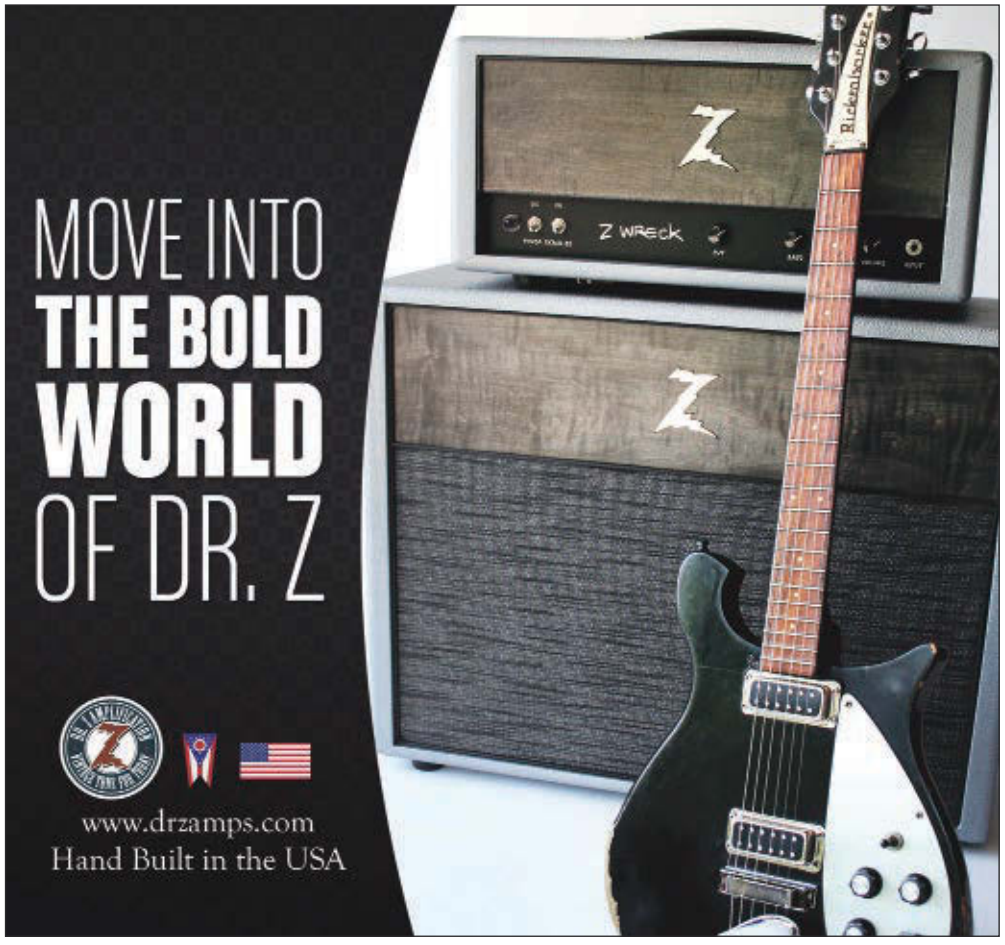
I left little pockets for things, like the little blues fills—they can be different every time. Like the *Images of Metheny* record, none of them were written out initially. I fashion an arrangement on the guitar and play it through a few times. They all happen pretty quickly—I think I did that arrangement in about a half-hour. I don't think I even wrote this one out for the producer. I just gave him a lead sheet.

Like many contemporary players, you perform material that goes beyond classical music. Do you think that the term "classical guitarist" still accurately describes modern players?

It does, because "classical guitar" refers to both the repertoire, which is chiefly classical, and the technique. For example, a rock technique, even of the greatest rock player or blues player, is not going to translate over to playing classical guitar. They would have to study the golf swing, basically! On some mechanical level, they'd have to start from the beginning. You can't play counterpoint or polyphony without some kind of proper mechanics—it just doesn't happen. Classical guitarists produce sound entirely from their own fingertips and their nails. There is no signal. There's nothing between them and the listener.

What advice would you give someone proficient in another style of guitar playing who wants to get into classical?

I would say it's certainly a noble endeavor, but it takes a lot of practice. I have students like that in my online school. They're sort of sniffing around the classical guitar, coming from rock or blues or something else. Certainly everybody is welcome, and I can teach anybody, but I think they have to be prepared to learn a very detailed golf swing, which is what I call it. Because a golf swing has to be pretty precise—there can't be a lot of excess movement. It's the same with the right hand in classical guitar. Also, I'm primarily interested in training classical



guitarists in the repertoire that the music was built on for years: Sor, Giuliani, the 19th century continental classical period. So for me, it's really about the music. You have to love the music.

As an educator, what's your take on the state of upcoming classical guitarists?
In terms of technical training, the mechanics of it, we're experiencing something of a golden age. In China, particularly at the conservatory in Beijing, there is a huge movement and output of very fine players—they can really play the most difficult repertoire at a very young age. We've seen that in Korea and Japan for many years as well. Even in Europe and the United States, education is starting to catch up with the demand. There were always people who wanted to study classical guitar, but there weren't that many teachers who really knew the stuff, and now there are many fine players from my generation who are also very fine teachers. As a result, students now are much more prepared. That's a good thing, because it means the art is moving forward.

Photo by gmdthree

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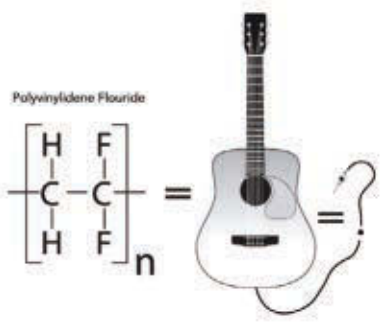
One Word: Plastics

BY LARRY FISHMAN



The introduction of polyvinylidene fluoride polymers to the piezo-pickup design arena was a true game changer.

In my last four columns, we've taken a detailed look at a variety of under-saddle piezo pickups. In all the cited examples, the sensing element was made of relatively hard PZT ceramic material—the only material available at the time of their designs. Also common to these pickups was the use of an individual sensing element for each string.

Starting in the mid '80s, however, a revolution was occurring with the development of new materials that exhibited piezoelectric activity. This new generation of materials was made from polyvinylidene fluoride polymers (PVDF) and PVDF copolymers P(VDF-TrFE). Using such processing techniques as stretching, heating, and polarizing with very high DC-voltage fields, these polymers could be transformed from ordinary plastic into fully piezo-active films/sheets.

From a transducer designer's point of view, these new materials were like a gift from the gods, because they were thin, flexible, and easy to cut with a simple shear or die-cutting press. Unlike the hard PZT ceramics (which were too brittle and fragile to use in long, thin strips), the polymers could traverse the entire length of a saddle. With PZT-based designs, the individual elements had to be placed *precisely* under each string, which meant that many variations of a given design were necessary to accommodate the differing string spacing from guitar model to guitar model.

With these new materials, it was no longer necessary to test and match individual elements for capacitance and thickness: The polymer sheets were being manufactured using an extrusion process that produced dimensionally precise and electrically homogeneous material.

Add to that the fact that polymers are low-Q materials. This means they do not have strong resonances—they're perfect transducer material for amplifying a musical instrument. Also, the softness of the materials provided new designs with a slightly slower response that many players felt was more natural and less "jumpy" than the PZT-based designs.

The first polymer-based system I'm aware of was the S.O.R.S system that appeared in Gibson acoustics around 1988. This design involved wrapping the lower half of the saddle with piezoelectric film before it was inserted into the slot. When set up properly, the system sounded great. But the critical tolerances required for fitting the saddle into the bridge slot, as well as the inherent fragility of attaching electrodes to the output cable, were detrimental to maintaining the consistency and quality of the output signal. The design was deemed impractical and discontinued after a couple of years.

In 1990, my company released the Acoustic Matrix line of pickups and EMG released their AT pickups. L.R. Baggs followed with their Ribbon Transducer, Highlander released the iP-1 system, and B-Band released the 22R pickup. In the early 2000s, my company released the Sonicore transducer to the OEM market, and then L.R. Baggs introduced their Element transducer.

All of these designs are functionally similar: They employ battery-powered onboard preamps and involve placing a piezoelectric polymer under the saddle of an acoustic guitar. The polymer is deformed by the changing force generated by the saddle reacting to the vibration of the strings. The opposing surfaces of the polymer are in contact with conductive electrodes that accumulate the varying charge, which is then passed along to the powered preamp via the attached lead wires. Each design also incorporates a grounded conductive shield that surrounds the transducer to block any environmentally produced electromagnetic interference.

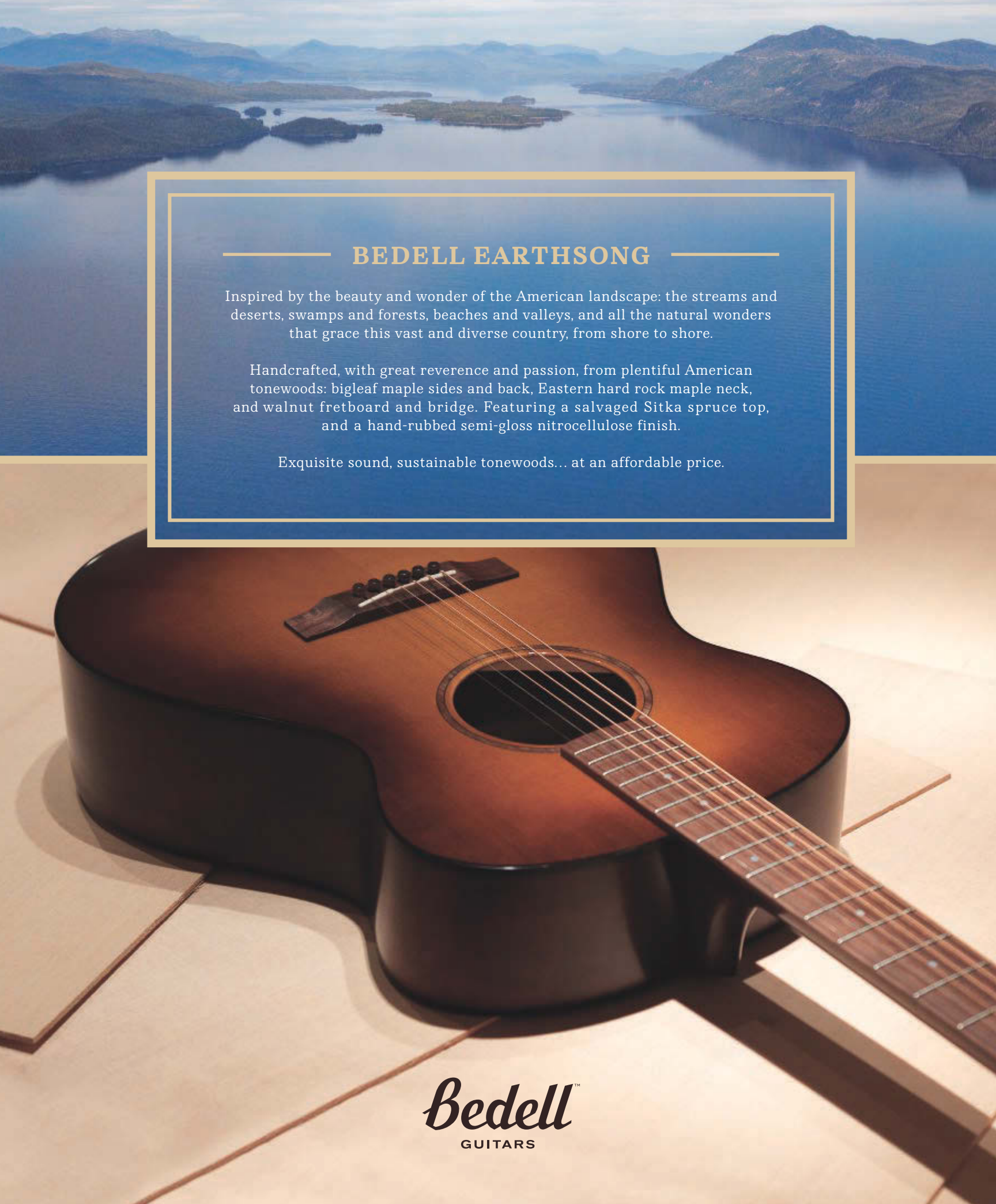
There are three basic design categories here: The Fishman Matrix and EMG AT are what I call "constructed designs." They are constructed from core materials, including the piezo polymers, and are wrapped with a thin and non-resilient shield. The B-Band 22R and L.R. Baggs Ribbon Transducer are laminates of conductive materials and piezo polymers. (In the case of the L.R. Baggs Ribbon Transducer, a resilient rubber layer is added.) Finally, the Fishman Sonicore and Highlander iP-1 are coaxial designs with a braided-wire shield, and the L.R. Baggs Element is a semi-coaxial design with a braided-wire shield.

These transducers all work well, but each has an upside and a downside. I feel that constructed transducers respond with the most accuracy and detail, and have the least effect on the pure performance of an instrument when played acoustically. This is because they don't contain spongy or resilient materials that tend to dampen an instrument's responsiveness. The downside to not having the resilient materials is that the installation must be *precise,* with flat and parallel surfaces on the bottom of the saddle and the bottom of the saddle slot.

It's my opinion that pickups with a braided-wire shield tend to dampen the acoustic response of an instrument and have a less-detailed sound due to the presence of the braided shield that's pliable and soft. The upside here is that they are somewhat more forgiving with respect to installation, and have a more pronounced bass response because the soft materials can benefit bass-deficient instruments.

Until next time, I'll leave you with this: In the 1967 film *The Graduate*, Mr. McGuire told Ben Braddock, "There's a great future in plastics." Indeed, plastics did help shape the future of under-saddle transducer design.

LARRY FISHMAN *is president and founder of Fishman Transducers, which he began in his garage in 1981. In the early '90s, he also co-founded and managed Parker Guitars (which was later sold to U.S. Music Corp.) with his friend Ken Parker.*



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Tragically Underused

ELECTRIC BARITONE GUITAR

BY THOMAS V. JONES

DEEP

Mention the words "electric baritone" to the average guitarist, and it instantly conjures a wealth of images—Clint Eastwood's steely gaze staring out from behind his cigarillo, the misty-mountain montage from *Twin Peaks*, Duane Eddy playing any number of his hit songs.

For these reasons, many players associate the baritone with twangy tones—iconic riffs in surf, rockabilly, and country. (Interestingly, though Alessandro Alessandroni's Spaghetti western guitar work is viewed as so definitively "baritone," all we really know is that he used a Gibson—and there were no production Gibson baritones at the time.) Regardless, twang is certainly not all a baritone can do. It's a staple for many metal and alt-rock guitarists who play in nonstandard tunings, and it's been featured in recordings by artists as diverse as Dave Matthews, Allan Holdsworth, the B-52s, Kaki King, System of a Down, Ian MacKaye (Minor Threat, Fugazi), Metallica, and even Britney Spears.

There are countless examples of standard guitars being used to emulate the effect of a baritone, too—from the James Bond theme to the Pixies' "Here Comes Your Man," Aerosmith's "Back in the Saddle," and the Posies' "Coming Right Along." But there's a lot more to a baritone than its tuning—a baritone is *not* just a standard guitar tuned way down. A baritone has taut low end that's much more muscular and powerful than a standard-tuned guitar, but also far more articulate and cutting than a bass. That's why it's great for everything from fattening up rhythm tracks to playing bass lines, soloing in standard-guitar note ranges, or standing as the sole 6-string in a song. A baritone's distinctive timbre is about a scale length that facilitates proper intonation and optimal string tension.

Mystery Train: Who Built the First Baritone?

There is some dispute as to who first mass-produced a guitar that could truly be considered an electric baritone. Some point to Jerry Jones as having led the way with his production models, but others say Danelectro's 6-string bass design qualifies as the first.

"A hundred years ago, the Germans produced baritone guitars," says guitar historian George Gruhn, owner of Gruhn Guitars in Nashville, "but I don't know much about them. Those were acoustic instruments, of course. They were experimenting with all voices."

In that group of early baritone-range instruments, I'd also add the mandocello (such as the K series instruments built by Gibson between 1905 and 1920), and maybe even go way back to the 1400s to the viola da gamba—a cello-like instrument with between five and seven strings for lower range, as well as frets (old strings tied around the neck) for better chord intonation. These instruments were the baritones of the mandolin and bowed-instrument families, respectively.

But as far as solidbodies go, Gruhn says, "The *true* electric baritone is a more recent thing. Until fairly recently, it had hardly been used at all. Gibson and Martin and Fender didn't do them. Danelectro had the 6-string bass and some others they considered to be baritones."

Nathan Daniel founded Danelectro in 1947, and his outfit made amplifiers for Sears, Roebuck & Company and Montgomery Ward throughout the late '40s. In 1954, Danelectro started producing electric guitars and amps under its own name, though it was simultaneously making guitars and amplifiers under other brand names, most notably Silvertone and Airline. In 1956, Danelectro introduced the 6-string baritone guitar—a design that was soon noticed by other companies.

The Fender VI—later dubbed the Bass VI—debuted in 1961 and was originally available until 1975, though

Continued on p. 87

CURRENT-PRODUCTION
Baritones to Try

Although the number of baritone guitars currently on the market is miniscule compared to standard-scale guitars, there are still many options available in a variety of styles—and, in many cases, at surprisingly affordable prices.

CORT Sunset Baritone
$980 street, cortguitars.com

DANELECTRO '56 Baritone
$419 street, danelectro.com

EASTWOOD Sidejack Baritone DLX
$469 street, eastwoodguitars.com

EPIPHONE Robb Flynn Love/Death Baritone Flying V
$699 street, epiphone.com

ESP LTD SC-607B Stef Carpenter Baritone 7-string
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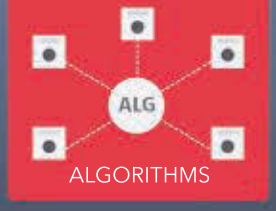

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> The 30"-scale Dano design always had a floppy low-E string. The idea for the baritone was to simply eliminate that problematic low E, shorten the scale to 28", retune to a fourth or fifth above the 6-string bass, and replace the wound 1st and 2nd strings with plain strings—the way an acoustic guitar is configured.
>
> ***—Jerry Jones***

Photo courtesy of Jerry Jones

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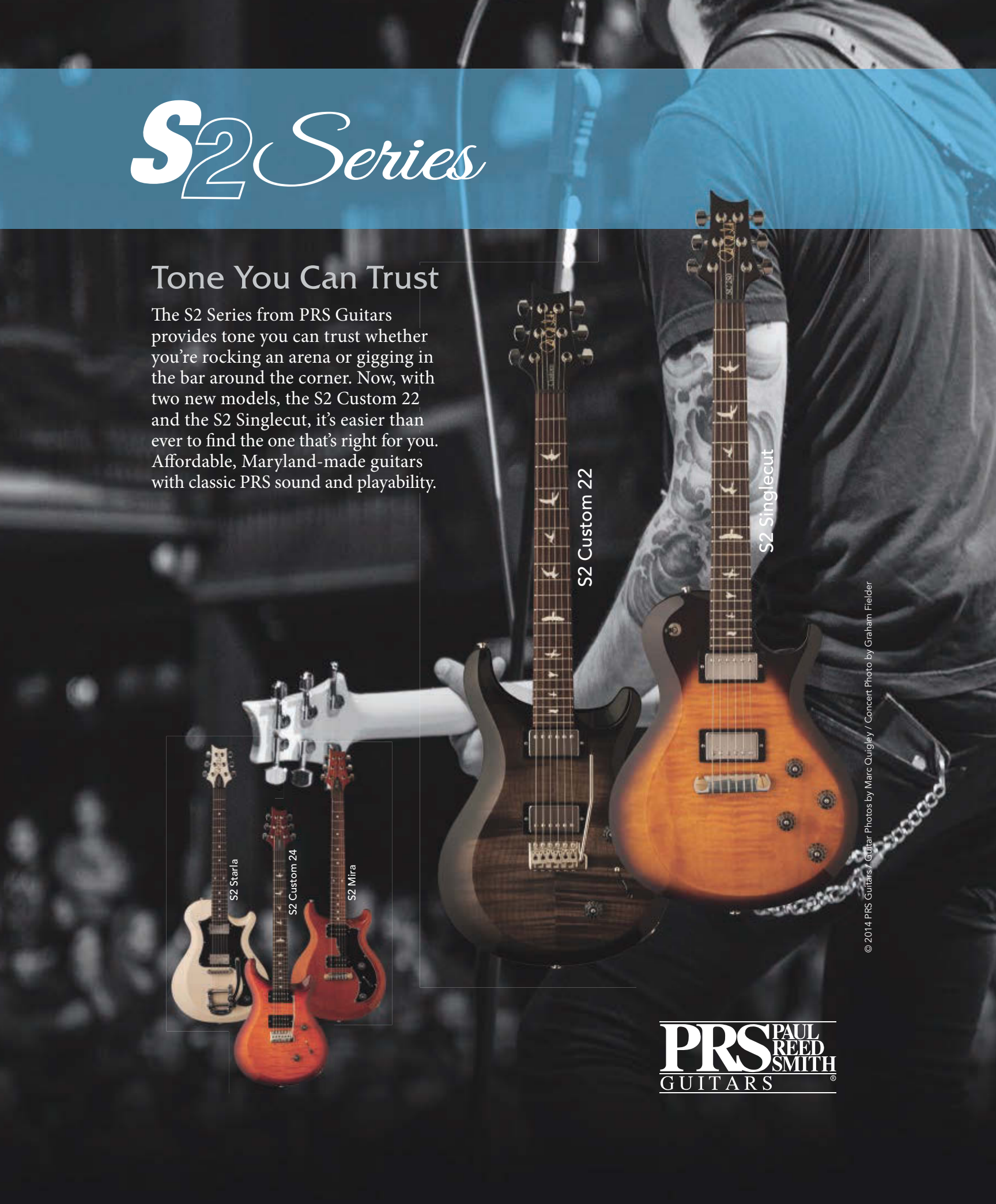

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BARITONE BOSS Luthier Joe Veillette

The one builder who probably has more invested in the electric baritone than any other is luthier Joe Veillette of Veillette Guitars. His experience goes back 35 years and includes partnerships with other innovative builders.

Based in Woodstock, New York, Veillette contends that the first true electric baritone was a model called the Shark, which he conceived around 1980, during the years he was in a partnership with luthier Harvey Citron. The Veillette-Citron Shark was developed with input from the Lovin' Spoonful's John Sebastian, and was later sought out by such luminaries as Eddie Van Halen, Jeff "Skunk" Baxter (Steely Dan, the Doobie Brothers), and Jorma Kaukonen (Jefferson Airplane, Hot Tuna).

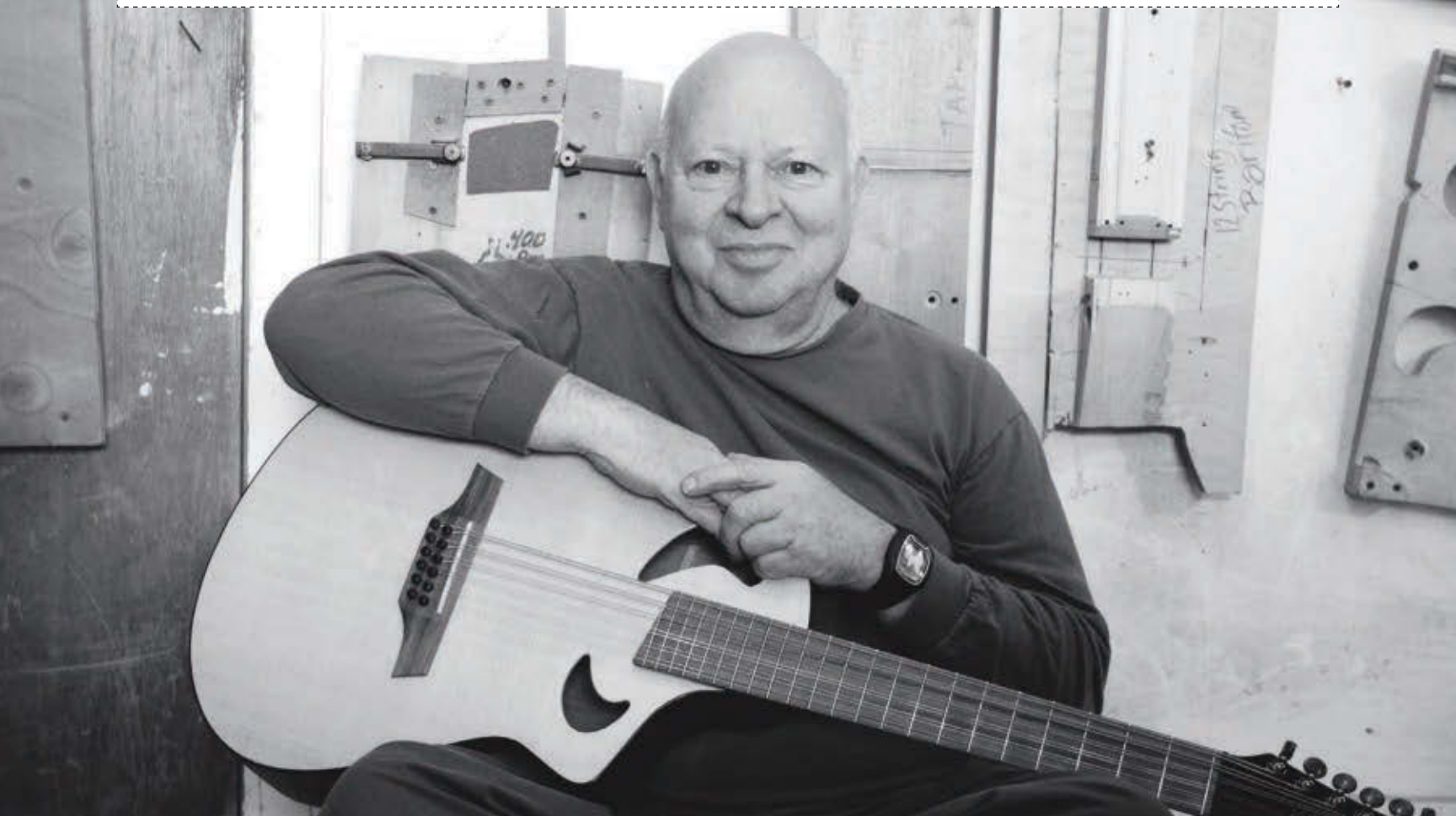
Like George Gruhn, Veillette contends that the first Danelectros were just 6-string basses. "Same with the Fender VI," he says. "Sebastian came to us wanting a shorter scale—because 30" is a lot of neck!

"We had the first one that was conceived and sold as a baritone," Veillette continues. "Then the Danelectro people came in trying to copyright the name 'baritone,' which was ridiculous. What stopped them was our magazine ad from 1980. We had to do *something* ... It cost me real money to keep making baritones for a while as we fought that. Other people were making what they called baritones, but two-thirds of my line was baritones—we've been more dependent on it than any other manufacturer."

From 1991 to 1994, Veillette partnered with famed bass builder Stuart Spector, and his instruments were sought out by even more top-tier players, including Billy Gibbons, bass legend Billy Sheehan, Earl Slick, Journey's Neal Schon, James Taylor, and Aerosmith's Joe Perry and Brad Whitford. "Dave Matthews bought his first baritone from us, and Eddie [Van Halen] eventually bought two 12-string baritones, too," he adds. Veillette also partnered with another esteemed bass builder, Michael Tobias, to develop Avante baritone acoustics for Alvarez.

Given his history with baritones, it's no surprise Veillette has seen the instrument evolve through a series of changes. His first Veillette-Citrons were solidbodies with piezo pickups but, "for Eddie and Sheehan I added magnetics," he says. For the past 10 years, he's moved toward acoustic instruments with a piezo pickup under the saddle. These can be heard on Kaki King's latest recordings, among others.

"Recently, I'm doing an equal number of 6- and 12-strings," Veillette explains. "All this has put me in a place to experiment with different tunings and scale lengths—my specialty is in tuning ranges and string tension."



Continued from p. 82

a few reissues and custom models have been available over the years. (Currently, Fender offers the Pawn Shop Bass VI, which features a bridge humbucker and two single-coils, while its Squier subsidiary offers the Vintage Modified Bass VI with the more traditional three-single-coil setup.)

About three years after Fender came out with the VI, Japanese instrument manufacturer Teisco started making baritone guitars such as the TB-64/ET-320. Teisco and various other Japanese instrument manufacturers also made longer-scale guitars under various brands, including Kingston, Demian, and Lindell throughout the '60s.

" ... choice of pickups is of critical importance. I recommend units that provide a clearer response and don't mask harmonics." —Thomas V. Jones

During the '60s, electric baritone guitars were widely used in the studio to create the "tic-tac" bass lines popularized in country music and other genres of the period. (Essentially, the tic-tac sound is created by doubling a bass line with a baritone guitar—or sometimes a guitar tuned down as low as possible. This adds extra depth and richness to low parts without ignoring the higher registers—something like putting beefier strings on a Tele tuned down to B or A.)

For many years, Jerry Jones Guitars built guitars, basses, baritones, and other instruments based on '50s and '60s Danelectros—though they featured better bridges and tuners, an adjustable truss rod, better electronics, and improved fretwork. Although Jerry Jones Guitars ceased production in 2011, its instruments are still highly sought after on the used market.

"The 30"-scale Dano design always had a floppy low-E string," says Jones. "The idea for the baritone was to simply eliminate that problematic low E, shorten the scale to 28", retune to a fourth or fifth above the 6-string bass, and replace the wound 1st and 2nd strings with plain strings—the way an acoustic guitar is configured. From a player's perspective, the advantages would be a more chord-friendly instrument with bendable strings. Musically, a baritone lays in the mix a little easier than a 6-string bass, and even when it's played in the upper register, it has a unique timbre, different from guitar. Many songwriters combine a capo with a baritone to build music around their own vocal ranges. Some guitarists get really crafty and play high parts with a capo on a baritone and use a regular guitar for the low parts."

Bit by the Bari Bug

As a luthier, I became interested in the baritone in the mid 1990s while working in the guitar repair department at World of Strings violin shop in Long Beach, California. I met Ron Escheté—a well-regarded 7-string chord-melody jazz guitarist—and wondered what it would be like for him to have access to lower, more defined,

Though the 30"-scale Fender Bass VI isn't what most luthiers would consider a baritone, its debut in 1961 spurred wider interest in downtuned guitar work.

better-rounded notes. So, I built Ron a prototype 7-string baritone guitar.

Soon after that I built a prototype baritone that was tuned to C, and showed it to Brian Setzer's former guitar tech, Rich Modica. He flipped—it sounded unique, with clear lows, like a piano—and asked to borrow it so he could show it to Brian. That instrument went on to be used with his swing band, the Brian Setzer Orchestra, so he could play in horn-friendly keys—but he also ended up using it for rockabilly tunes such as "Mystery Train" and "I Won't Stand in Your Way." This led to a production deal with Gretsch, which produced the Spectra Sonic C Melody baritone I designed, along with a bass and a standard-scale guitar. Although the Gretsch versions are no longer being made, we now produce our own TV Jones C Melody baritone. This summer, Cort is also coming out with the new Sunset Baritone, a more affordable import version of my C Melody.

Scale and Tuning: 6-String Bass vs. Baritone Guitar

One thing I noticed early on was that some guitars being termed "baritones" were simply 6-string basses—they were made to be tuned from E to E, an octave below a standard-scale guitar. The problem with that scenario is that open-position chords sound muddy and don't have enough midrange bite to cut through. Further, in order to achieve optimal string tension and intonation, a bass should have a longer scale—typically 34" or 35".

Because of this, my definition of a baritone is a long-scale guitar tuned below standard E tuning but not as far down as a full octave. Most baritone scale lengths are between 26" and 30".

The longer the scale, the greater the string tension and, generally, the more accurate intonation is all the way up the fretboard. Conversely, tuning a regular guitar down a fourth (B-B) or fifth (A-A) from standard will cause the 6th string to flop all over the place and result in more pitch problems the further you travel up the neck.

Besides providing more string tension and better intonation, a baritone's longer scale yields a quicker onset and longer

YOUTUBE IT

To see Tom "TV" Jones' original C Melody baritone guitar in action, check out YouTube user Dark Angel's hi-definition version of Brian Setzer playing "Mystery Train" in Tokyo with the Stray Cats.
YouTube search term: Mystery Train.Brian Setzer.

Photo courtesy of Gruhn Guitars

ANDY CICHON
Billy Joel / Shania Twain / Shotgun Wedding

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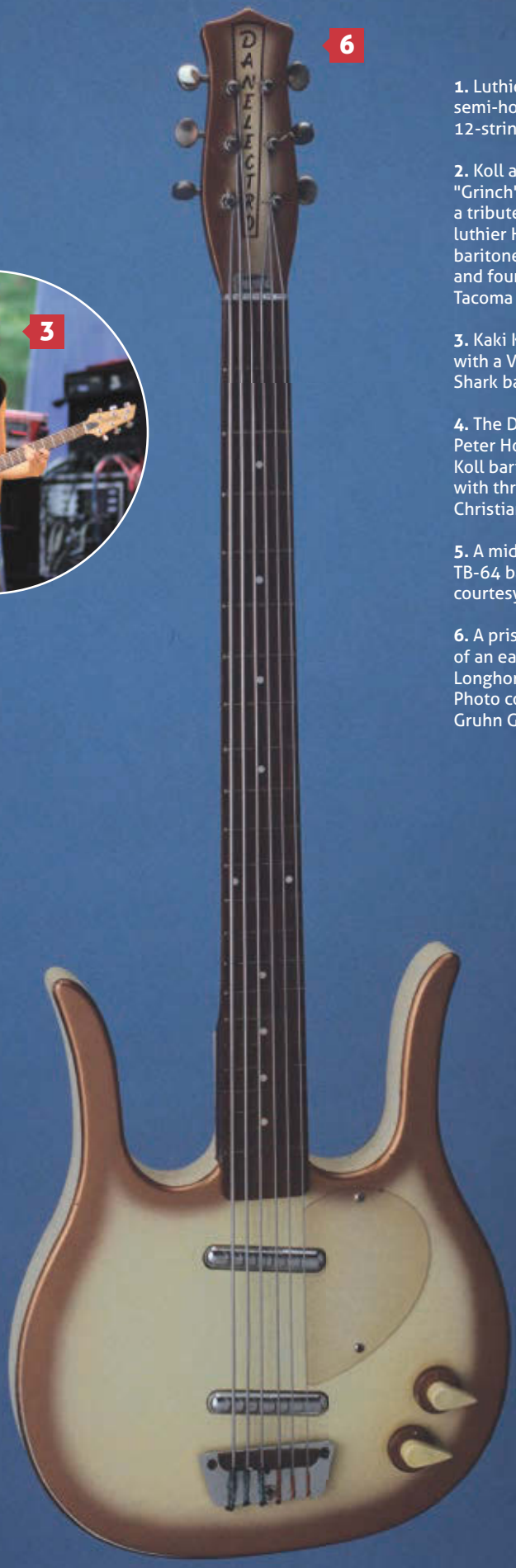


1. Luthier Saul Koll's semi-hollow Glide 12-string.

2. Koll also built this "Grinch" baritone as a tribute to the late luthier Harvey Leach, baritone enthusiast and founder of Tacoma Guitars.

3. Kaki King onstage with a Veillette Shark baritone.

4. The Dandy Warhols' Peter Holstrom with his Koll baritone loaded with three Charlie Christian-style pickups.

5. A mid-'60s Teisco TB-64 baritone. Photo courtesy of Åke Strömer

6. A pristine example of an early Danelectro Longhorn 6-string bass. Photo courtesy of Gruhn Guitars

decay when a note is picked. That's why baritones seem to have such explosive attack and endless sustain in comparison to a downtuned guitar with a 25 1/2" or 24 3/4" scale.

"Most of the baritones I build are based on my Glide series, and I lean towards 27 3/4" or 28" scale lengths," says Saul Koll of Koll Guitar Company in Portland, Oregon. "It's a functional decision because most guys are coming from a standard guitar and want something just *a little bit* longer and more familiar. Tuning is usually B to B. With a Bigsby and a good rig, being tuned down that low is magical—that middle area between bass and guitar is just so cool!"

Although a lot of baritone players prefer B-to-B tuning, there isn't as much of a consensus on a standard baritone tuning as there is with regular-scale guitar. Most players prefer something that allows them to use the same fingerings they use in standard tuning, but some prefer turning the pegs in a way that lets them play open chords. The lower you go, the more rumble you'll achieve. The most common baritone tunings are A–D–G–C–E–A and B–E–A–D–F♯–B, though some aficionados use the horn-friendly C–F–B♭–E♭–G–C. The latter automatically converts chimey open-string chord grips, such as G, D, and C into concert E♭, B♭, and A♭—chords that require a barre in standard tuning.

To maximize the taut effect of a baritone's longer scale and avoid any muddiness, I'd add that your choice of pickups is of critical importance. I recommend units that provide a clearer response and don't mask harmonics. This will give you a more defined low end—which is, after all, what the baritone is all about.

Another Flavor, or the Main Attraction?

In addition to the previously mentioned perks of baritone guitar—girthy, articulate low end with sparkling mids and highs—there are additional benefits to a baritone. So many, in fact, that once you acquire one you may be tempted to make it your go-to instrument rather than an axe for switching things up once in a while. I like to tell people it's similar to using a capo on a guitar—except in the opposite direction.

If you're a singer, you'll also discover very interesting new things about your voice as you apply it to keys you can't reach with a standard guitar. If you stick with standard-tuning intervals, you don't have to alter fingerings or relearn anything. Experiment with your library of songs in different keys and listen to how they take on a new life. (It reminds me a bit of how, nearly 300 years ago, Bach wrote *The Well-Tempered Clavier* with two pieces in each key—and each one had its own mood.) Or, get adventurous with different tunings. Either way, adventurous players are bound to discover new sonic realms that just aren't possible with a shorter-scale instrument. The timbres and thick, piano-like responsiveness of a baritone will drag you into new musical territory, no matter how you apply it. In fact, that's why I personally believe the electric baritone is one of the most versatile fretted stringed instruments around.

THOMAS V. JONES *is the world-renowned pickup maker and luthier at TV Jones (tvjones.com). His client list includes such legends as Brian Setzer, Billy Gibbons, and John Mayer.*

How to Install Standard and Locking Strap Buttons

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JOHN LEVAN

Fig. 1. Strap buttons come in an amazing array of shapes and sizes.

Fig. 2. To install a strap button on the treble side of a flattop's neck heel, you need to take two measurements. One is the distance down from the fretboard.

Fig. 3. The second measurement is the distance away from the body.

Fig. 4. Mark the strap button's location by pressing the screw tip into the wood.

Fig. 5. Measure drill bit depth, then mark it with a red Sharpie.

Fig. 6. Drilling the hole. Don't rush—let the tools do the work and keep an eye on that depth mark.

For most performers, it's essential that a guitar has strap buttons (**Fig. 1**). Though many guitars come with strap buttons already installed, some don't. If you have a guitar without strap buttons and want to install them, the good news is it's a straightforward job—if you know the correct procedures.

There are two critical considerations: The first is to find the right location. If strap buttons are installed incorrectly, your guitar won't balance well when you play standing up. The second consideration is to be very careful when installing a button on the neck heel—you can crack it. So, using both an acoustic and an electric guitar to illustrate the process, let's find out how to do this right and avoid those potential problems.

Our instruments. Recently, a client brought in two guitars: a Larrivée OM-03 Vintage Sunburst and a 2002 Gibson SG Supreme. The Larrivée already had an endpin, but it lacked a strap button. The owner wanted me to install one so he could stand when playing onstage. For the SG Supreme, he wanted me to replace the stock buttons with a set of locking devices, so he could safely rock out with his band. For the Larrivée, we decided on a standard nickel-plated strap button and felt washer from Allparts; for the SG Supreme, we chose Schaller Security Locks.

One caveat. My client wondered if adding a strap button would devalue his acoustic. On most *modern* flattops, a correctly installed strap button won't devalue the instrument (two exceptions are high-end vintage guitars or classical guitars). A strap button is useful for working musicians, and most guitar manufacturers will offer to install one before the guitar leaves the factory. Another reason to add a strap button to an acoustic is that tying a strap around the headstock (the old-school approach) can damage the finish, and in some cases, add unnecessary pressure to the neck joint. There's a lot of debate about this. Most collectors would never want anything installed on a guitar that was not considered original, so if you have a vintage axe keep this in mind.

Selecting the location. Let's begin with the acoustic. The first step is to decide where to install the strap button. For the Larrivée, I determined that the best location was on the treble side of the neck heel about 1 1/4" below the top of the fretboard (**Fig. 2**) and about 1 1/2" out from the body (**Fig. 3**). I selected this spot for balance and structural integrity: This placement will keep the guitar from leaning away from you when you play, and this part of the neck heel is very stout, so you won't have to worry about cracking the heel—assuming the button is installed correctly, as we'll discuss in a moment.

Once you've made these two measurements and located their intersection, mark it. You can mark the location using a pencil or gently press the strap button screw into the heel (**Fig. 4**).

Tip: If you use a screw to mark the drilling location, be careful not to slip—you could scratch the heel.

Selecting the drill bit. The goal is to drill a hole that's *slightly* smaller than the outside diameter of the screw. If you use a drill bit that's too big, the screw will strip the wood and the button will not hold properly. Most strap button screws are relatively close in size, but they do vary depending on the manufacturer. Make sure you measure both the threads and the screw shaft so you know what size drill bit to use.

For example: The outside diameter (including threads) of my strap-button screw was 9/64", and the shaft (without

threads) was about 7/64" in diameter. By choosing a 7/64" bit, I left enough wood for the screw to *tap* (or thread) itself into the heel without damaging it.

Gauging drill bit depth. With the screw inserted into the button, measure the depth needed for the screw and mark your selected drill bit with a red Sharpie (**Fig. 5**). This way, you'll know how deep to drill the hole. If you drill too far, you could hit the neck pocket. But if the hole is too shallow, you could crack the heel when you install the screw. Measure carefully and get it right.

Drilling the hole. This is where all your measurements pay off. Remember, you don't have to push hard—let the drill and bit do the work. You simply control the process by keeping the bit aligned and watching the depth (**Fig. 6**).

Before you insert the screw, use a medium-tip Phillips screwdriver to countersink the hole you just drilled (**Fig. 7**). This prevents the finish from chipping around the hole when you insert and tighten the strap-button screw. After countersinking the hole, install the strap button with a small felt washer between the wood and metal. The washer prevents the strap button from marring or denting the finish and wood, and it looks nice.

Voilà—a correctly installed strap button can add utility to a steel-string guitar (**Fig. 8**).

Strap-locking devices. There are many different types and brands of locking devices on the market, but as I mentioned, my client wanted Schaller Security Locks (**Fig. 9**) for his SG. Once you've selected your locking hardware, it's crucial you measure the length of the included screws that go into the body and subsequently attach to the locking mechanism. In a moment, we'll see why.

The work begins. Installing the Schaller button on the SG's lower bout was easy because it was already pre-drilled for the original strap button I'd removed. Because the Schaller screws with their integrated buttons were longer than the original Gibson hardware (**Fig. 10**), I redrilled the hole to the proper depth using a 7/64" drill bit. So far, so good.

Ah, but the other strap button was a different story. On SGs, Gibson typically installs a strap button on the back of the guitar, right behind the neck joint. After I removed the stock button and measured the depth of the Schaller screw against the SG's neck joint (**Fig. 11**), I realized the screw would penetrate too far and possibly hit the truss rod. Yikes!

This left me with two choices: see if I could use the original hardware, or shorten the supplied Schaller screw and integrated button. Fortunately the Gibson button fit inside the Schaller locking mechanism, so I decided to reuse the original screw and button, rather than shorten and rethread the Schaller screw. Once again, I included a felt washer between the body and button.

Loading the strap. One of the features that makes the Schaller system so secure is that the locking mechanisms attach to your strap. It's simple: Slip the strap-lock base into the strap's slit. Place the included washer over the device's shaft. Using a 9/16" deep-well nutdriver, tighten the nut over the washer (**Fig. 12**). This makes it nearly impossible for the locking mechanism to slip out of the strap. Rinse and repeat.

To mount the strap to the guitar, simply pull up on each lock's post, slip the lock onto its respective button, and release the post to lock it to the button.

JOHN LEVAN *has written five guitar repair books, all published by Mel Bay. His bestseller, Guitar Care, Setup & Maintenance, is a detailed guide with a forward by Bob Taylor. LeVan welcomes questions about his PG column or books. Drop an email to guitarservices@aol.com.*

Fig. 7. Countersinking the hole with a Phillips screwdriver.

Fig. 8. Place a felt washer between the neck and button, then slowly tighten the screw until the button is flush to the neck heel.

Fig. 9. Each Schaller Security Lock consists of an integrated screw and button, a locking mechanism that attaches to the guitar strap, and a washer and nut used to secure the locking device to the strap.

Fig. 10. Comparing the length of the stock SG screw and button (left) with the Schaller screw.

Fig. 11. The Schaller screw is too long for the SG's neck joint—it might hit the truss rod.

Fig. 12. Attaching the Schaller Security Lock to the strap.

What the Funk?

BY STEVE COOK

When I read descriptions of gear or EQ settings, the word funk comes up an awful lot, *especially* when it comes to bass. But we seem to be all over the map musically when it comes to defining funk. This month, I hope to shed some light on the funk, dispel a myth or two, and not make too many enemies in the process.

Funk is both a musical style and a musical movement. It started down a path with nice suits and slick hair, ran into bell-bottoms and drum machines, and eventually leaked into every genre of music. You'll find funky licks showing up in jazz, country, new age, and even classical music if you listen hard enough. But when someone mentions bass and funk in the same sentence, we instantly channel into a certain EQ setting paired with some type of envelope filter or wah pedal.

If players from different eras played the exact same notes on these records, would they be any more (or less) funky?

If I asked you to name a funk-bass player, what's the first name that comes to mind? I'll almost *guarantee* none of you thought of James Kirkland. Kirkland was an upright player who started touring in the '50s with Ricky Nelson, and was one of the first rockabilly players to slap the upright—a precursor to what electric players are doing today. One could argue that this isn't really funk, but as much as Larry Graham was compensating for the lack of a drummer when he "invented" slap electric, Kirkland was doing just that as well.

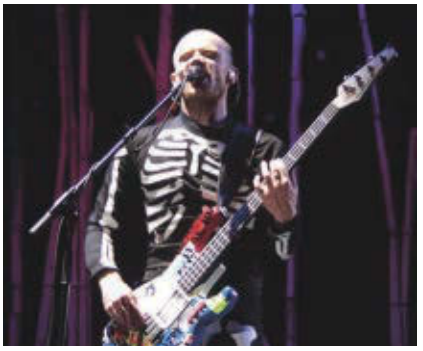
After Kirkland came a personal favorite of mine: James Lee Jamerson and his '62 Fender P "Funk Machine" with horribly dead flatwounds. He's arguably one of the most influential bassists of all time, but he had nothing fancy up his sleeve to get his Motown funk together—just the one finger and a groove.

Before too long, other monumental and funk-tastically important players came along. Bootsy, Stanley Clarke, Louis Johnson, Doug Wimbish, and the aforementioned Larry Graham shaped the '70s into a ridiculously funky era. Their tones started getting brighter and they ventured into using effect pedals. Soon the lines grayed between keyboard and bass, and the two instruments were emulating the other. As funk progressed, so did the splintering of the genre and the tone. A young Michael Balzary (you know him as Flea) entered the scene with his band Red Hot Chili Peppers and influenced a whole new generation of funk bassists.

So back to the discussion of tone: What *is* the funk tone? Is Flea's tone funkier than Jamerson's? (Remember that we're talking tone, not playing.) Flea's tone is certainly brighter, and because of modern recording techniques, congruently a bit more pointed. Flea also uses wah, overdrive, and envelope filters, whereas Jamerson did not. Is his tone *better* than Jamerson's? Some would say yes, others no.

To muddy the waters even more, let's talk time travel within music. What if Flea (and his current tone) played David Hungate's bass line on "Lowdown" by Boz Scaggs? Or what if Marcus Miller played on "I Was Made For Lovin' You" by Kiss? If players from different eras played the exact same notes on these records, would they be any more (or less) funky?

Naturally, the records would differ tonally. But in my humble opinion, the funk is from within. I love, love, love that



What if Flea had played David Hungate's "Lowdown" bass line? Would it be as funky?

Flea has inspired thousands of people to play bass. I also hope that those same kids realize that funk is *not* about a mid-scoop EQ or a product with the name "funk" in it. Just like there are no wrong notes in jazz, there are no wrong tones in funk. You of course want what's right for the track, but the fingers are key. So if you want to be a funk player, why would you buy anything labeled "funk"?

Trying to sell the funk in a funk pedal or amp is simply marketing. In amp-modeling software presets you see rock, country, funk, and so on for days on end. Does that mean you have to play rock licks with the rock setting? Of course not. These days, you are probably playing country licks with those settings! And the same holds true for funk. It's merely a jumping-off point that someone has programmed for you. You don't have to use someone else's preset.

At its core, the funk tone is the tone that you want it to be. If you think it's funky, then it is. Music has no boundaries or presets. Let your ears guide you and your fingers be the translator for your funky soul.

STEVE COOK
started as a touring bass player when printed maps were the only way to get there. His extensive studio and touring credits run the gamut from rock to jazz to country. Also a busy producer and WWII aviation junkie, he welcomes you to reach out via Twitter @shinybass.

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Bass Ramps: Right for You?

BY HEIKO HOEPFINGER

The first electric basses came with several accessories that might look odd to players only familiar with modern instruments. Many had huge covers for the bridge and pickup areas. With these installed, the only possible playing area was close to the neck, where everyone expected us to play while serving the rest of the band with warm, supportive, and discrete low end. Back then nobody considered anything other than finger- or thumb-style playing. There were thumb and finger rests above and below the strings to accommodate either preference.

It didn´t take long for bass players to start removing the covers (though the thumb rests remained in place for some time) and the potential playing area expanded. Nowadays we're used to playing everywhere from bridge to neck, depending on the desired tone. But unlike the classic thumb rest, the pickup extension underneath the strings can get in our way and influence our playing simply by leaving us less space.

Some players use the pickup as a thumb rest, but tilt their picking hand so as not to play in the limited space above the pickup, while others like to have

Left: Photo courtesy garywillis.com **Below**: Photo courtesy status-graphite.com

Right: Gary Willis demonstrating what a ramp does for him.

Below: An adjustable ramp.

something under their fingers to keep them from digging too deeply into the strings. Playing directly above a pickup—that is, close to the strings—leaves less room to move your fingers, which can sometimes facilitate faster playing, with improved accuracy and evenness. Without the possibility of playing very hard, you can develop a light, speedy touch.

Whether that's liberating or limiting depends on your musical needs. But if you get into the habit of resting on the pickup, you may find yourself restricted to only those picking positions. If you like that method, but wish to expand your playing area to the entire range from bridge to neck, consider using a ramp. In most cases, this is a block of wood shaped to fit between your pickups and provide a uniform feel as you shift your picking position toward the neck or bridge.

Gary Willis is probably the most prominent pioneer of ramps. "I suppose I invented that," he says, "but I've heard of other people using it independently of me. It started around 1980 as a solution to protect my fingers from getting cut by the adjustable pole pieces in a pair of pickups mounted side by side. I went back to one pickup on the next bass but added a piece of wood instead." (Willis' website, garywillis.com, includes info on building a ramp.)

The ideal ramp provides a seamless area under the strings, level with the pickups and mirroring the fretboard radius so as to maintain uniform distance across all strings. (Since most pickups are flat on top, some basses come with an integrated assembly of ramp and pickups, using one large housing.)

You can get a general sense of whether this playing style is right for you by adjusting the pickups very close to the strings, but that's not the whole package. The more fingers (or thumb) you tend to use, the more you risk getting stuck. A good ramp will help keep your fingers in place, though only you can judge whether this approach is right for you. Will it promote speedier playing, more efficient movement, and improved tone, as Willis suggests, or instead limit your expression?

An example of a slanted "slap-ramp."

Photo courtesy status-graphite.com

Ramps are most often used on fretless basses, because these are generally played more softly than fretted basses. (A string hitting a metallic fret sounds way nicer than one falling flat against a fretless fingerboard, so you often want to soften your touch on fretless.)

Willis also discusses the change in tone resulting from a lighter touch. He compensates by cranking his amp's volume, and describes the resulting tone as bigger, with stronger fundamentals, the notes ringing out louder and longer. When you play hard, you loose some of the vibration when the string hits the fretboard. This initial kick is often what makes you get heard in a loud band. Hitting the fretboard produces strong upper harmonics that slowly "wobble out" as the string vibration settles into a sinusoidal waveform. For some players, these frequencies are precisely the quality that differentiates basses from synths. Others bassists—especially jazz players—opt for the enhanced evenness and speed a ramp can provide. Ramps are most often mounted using double-sided tape, so installation is simple and reversible.

While we're on the subject of ramps: Ever heard of the far less popular slap-ramp? The name is a bit misleading, since they're not intended to aid slapping so much as the complementary popping of high strings. They are mounted directly at the end of the fretboard, reducing the distance between string and body as desired. (Presumably, close enough for your fingers not to get stuck, but far enough to get hold of the string.) Some are even slanted to allow different techniques by altering positions. It can also be the tool that helps you nail that Victor Wooten-style double-thumping.

HEIKO HOEPFINGER *is a German physicist and long-time bassist, classical guitarist, and motorcycle enthusiast. His work on fuel cells for the European orbital glider Hermes led him to form BassLab (basslab.de)—a manufacturer of monocoque guitars and basses.*

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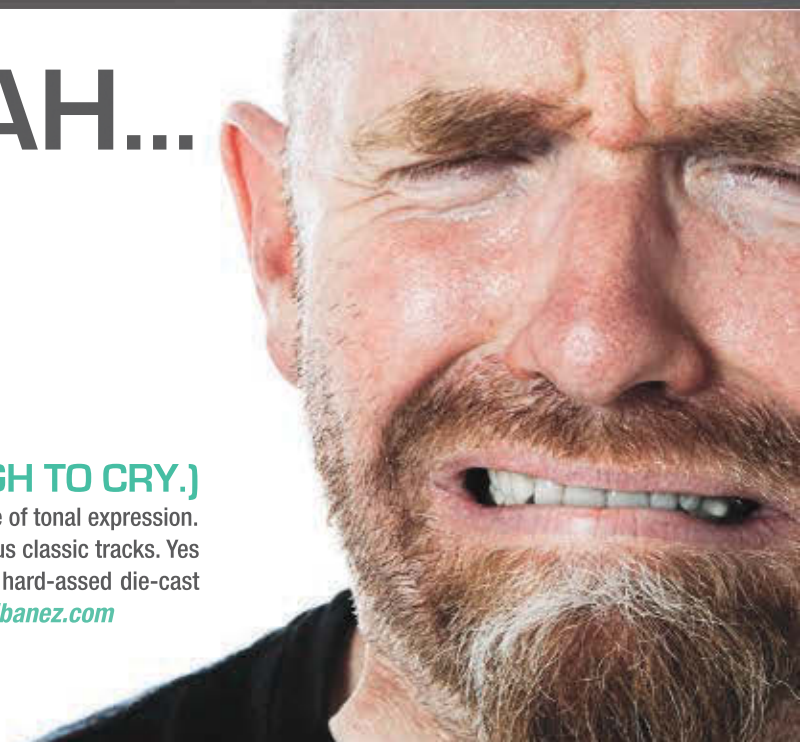

That Guitar Costs HOW MUCH?!

*ARE GUITARISTS **SPOILED** OR **LUCKY**?* BY MICHAEL ROSS

Chris Isaak—the pompadoured crooner of hits like "Wicked Game" and "Baby Did a Bad Bad Thing"—used to come into a vintage guitar store where I worked. He would look at a guitar's price and joke, "For that much money, I don't want to play it—I want to drive it!" These instruments were between $5,000 and $15,000. Though Isaak was still a bargain hunter, he'd achieved considerable commercial success and wasn't what you'd call a cheapskate. But his thinking reflected that of countless players of the time.

And this was well before the incredible rise in quality control and bang-for-buck value we've seen in both American and imported guitars over the last decade or so. Back then you really didn't *need* a guitar that cost as much as a car—and you definitely don't now. Many great players get gigs with top acts—from Paul McCartney to Nine Inch Nails—playing quality instruments that don't even come close to maxing-out a $5,000 credit card.

The truth is, when it comes to buying instruments, electric guitarists are spoiled—especially compared to players of many other instruments. Granted, we have to purchase at least one amp, and most of us will also use pedals or rack effects. But even if you go a little nuts at your local guitar shop and spend 10 grand on a reliable touring rig, it's nothing compared to how much, say, a symphony orchestra harpist has to plunk down for her dream instrument.

"I paid $25,000 for my harp in 2001. The same model purchased new today would be $37,000," says Allegra Lilly, principal harpist for the St. Louis Symphony. "You could easily get a great concert grand for $20,000–$25,000, though I would guess that the most popular model goes for $33,000."

Or suppose you played double bass. Freelance classical bassist Ali Cook says she paid $17k for hers. "Colleagues of mine have basses that range from $10,000 to $50,000. Once we, hopefully, win a permanent [symphonic] position, we would generally

Commercially successful guitarists, like Chris Isaak, are able to play budget instruments and sound good. Classical musicians aren't as fortunate when it comes to instrument price tags.

upgrade to an instrument that could cost up to $200,000."

If you play traditional jazz guitar, you might pay as much as $30,000 for a custom instrument like a Benedetto. Yet you could just as easily gig with an Eastman, Ibanez, Godin, Epiphone, or Gretsch archtop and come in at under a grand. It's interesting, though, that new instruments for traditional jazz players are the ones that reach into the range of those earmarked for classical players. Are classical and jazz musicians dedicated to their craft in some deeper way than pop musicians, and thus willing to spend more money for their instrument?

Not necessarily. More likely it's because they have no choice. A high-end jazz box has more in common with a violin than with a Telecaster. The relationship between archtops and classical instruments becomes apparent when you hear Cook describe why symphonic quality instruments are so pricey—and why orchestral players need them.

"The instruments are acoustic, so the wood used, the measurements, and even the varnish can affect the resulting sound," she explains. "They can takes months or longer to make." A similar construction process is used to make a hand-built archtop guitar, and explains why they too can be so costly.

More expensive instruments offer sonic advantages as well. "When you're auditioning for one spot in an orchestra against dozens of competitors, having an instrument that projects sound half as far as the next guy's can seriously hurt your chances," Cook continues. "Everyone's technique and musicality being equal, the quality of instrument has noticeable advantages."

Jazz guitarists who use amplifiers don't have to worry about projection, but many traditional players work with transparent amps, often at relatively low volume where the acoustic properties of the guitar are audible. But traditional jazz guitarists also resemble classical players in that they can ply their craft with a single instrument, whereas guitarists engaged in popular music usually need a variety of axes to be competitive.

That last bit may sound like a story we tell our significant others, but it is nevertheless true: Most working guitarists need both humbucking and single-coil models, and often a quality acoustic as well, not to mention backup instruments for each type. Even with relatively inexpensive models, costs can add up.

Photo by Sheryl Louis

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This student model pedal harp by Salvi Harps costs $19,400, while elite harp models cost upwards of $100k.

Still, let's do the math for a bare minimum typical rig a pro guitarist might need to be properly equipped for most gigs:

Fender American Standard Stratocaster	$1,199.99
Gibson Les Paul Standard	$2,999.00
Martin D-18	$2,199.00
Vox AC-30	$ 999.00
Ibanez Tube Screamer	$ 99.00
Line 6 DL4	$ 249.00
Total (not including tax and/or shipping)	**$7,747.96**

We could add another guitar or amp, or an additional pedal or two (or five) and still be under the cost of the cheapest professional double bass.

So what are we complaining about? Walter Carter, who worked with famed vintage dealer George Gruhn for years and now owns Carter Vintage Guitars, wonders. "Musicians have never had any money, so an instrument of high quality has always been high-priced relative to a musician's income," he says. "But there are good quality utility instruments now that are cheaper than they have ever been. A Les Paul was $250 in the '50s. You can get a copy now for not much more, and the real thing for $2,500. New cars were under $2,000 in the '50s, and they are over $20,000 now. That ratio makes guitars a better deal now than they ever were."

What about the costly vintage instruments Carter sells? "Most guitar players are not willing to spend collectable prices for working instruments because they will put wear on it and decrease the value by playing them, though they may use a high-end guitar in the studio," he notes. According to Carter, Nashville studio players favor reliability over vintage appeal and tend to employ newer instruments in the $1,000 to $2,500 range. "The higher-end vintage guitars go mostly to collectors and wealthy musicians," he says.

The player who purchases a guitar in the classical instrument price range for use on gigs is rare, but not unheard of. Take Joe Bonamassa—while he might not consider himself wealthy, he travels with three vintage Les Pauls whose worth must easily top five figures each—maybe even six. Of those instruments he has said, "They have a certain feel to them, and a clarity that makes you play better. There is that scorching high end that is not too bright. The pickups have only a little more output than a Strat, which helps the clarity." Bonamassa also recently purchased a 1956 Fender Strat in a custom cream color from Carter for around $50,000.

Before you gasp and clutch your heart, consider this web post by violin luthier Kevin Lee, in which he explains what kind of violin you get in various price ranges. One post section is labeled: *$6,000-$50,000: The beginning of professional instruments. (Yes, the price goes up exponentially from here)*, and one bit of advice he offers is, "There

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Classical bassists might use a double bass ranging from $20,000 to $50,000, but those playing permanently in an orchestra would likely spend more than $200k on a premier instrument.

are many symphonies that will not accept your application unless you are playing a violin worth at least $15,000, many much higher, no matter how good you or your instrument may sound."

I think we can all agree that Bonamassa is as dedicated to his career and music as the typical symphonic violinist, and is far from scuffling. In fact, it would be hard to imagine he earns less than a symphony musician, whose pay can range from $28,000 to a maximum of $115,000 a year (2010 estimates from Berklee College of Music). So it makes perfect sense that, like them, he invests in instruments that help him perform at the highest level. Still, while not all of us can afford a '59 Les Paul, the good news is that we don't have to.

As Carter says, good guitars have gotten cheaper. I recently played an Epiphone Les Paul Standard Plustop Pro, which streets for under $500. This instrument went well beyond "good"—I would be happy doing any gig or session with it. For that matter, I have gone toe-to-toe with a fine guitarist playing a real Gibson Les Paul through a Marshall stack (total cost $5,000 or more), while I played a Danelectro Pro reissue through a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe (total cost around $1,000) and held my own sonically—not because I'm so amazing (I'm not), but because that inexpensive equipment sounds so darn good.

On top of everything else, popular guitar tone is much more subjective than classical tone. Pawnshop prizes like Harmony, Silvertone, and Teisco guitars increasingly appear in the hands of professional players tired of traditional Fender and Gibson sounds. We are lucky to live in an age when good guitars are cheap and cheap guitars are considered good.

So how spoiled *and* lucky are we? Just ask a concert string player who has taken out the equivalent of a student loan to buy a single instrument. Think about that the next time you balk at the price of a guitar. Consider whether this is the instrument that will help you be all you can be as a player, and then ponder how much achieving that goal is worth to you. Finally, be very grateful you don't play concert harp.

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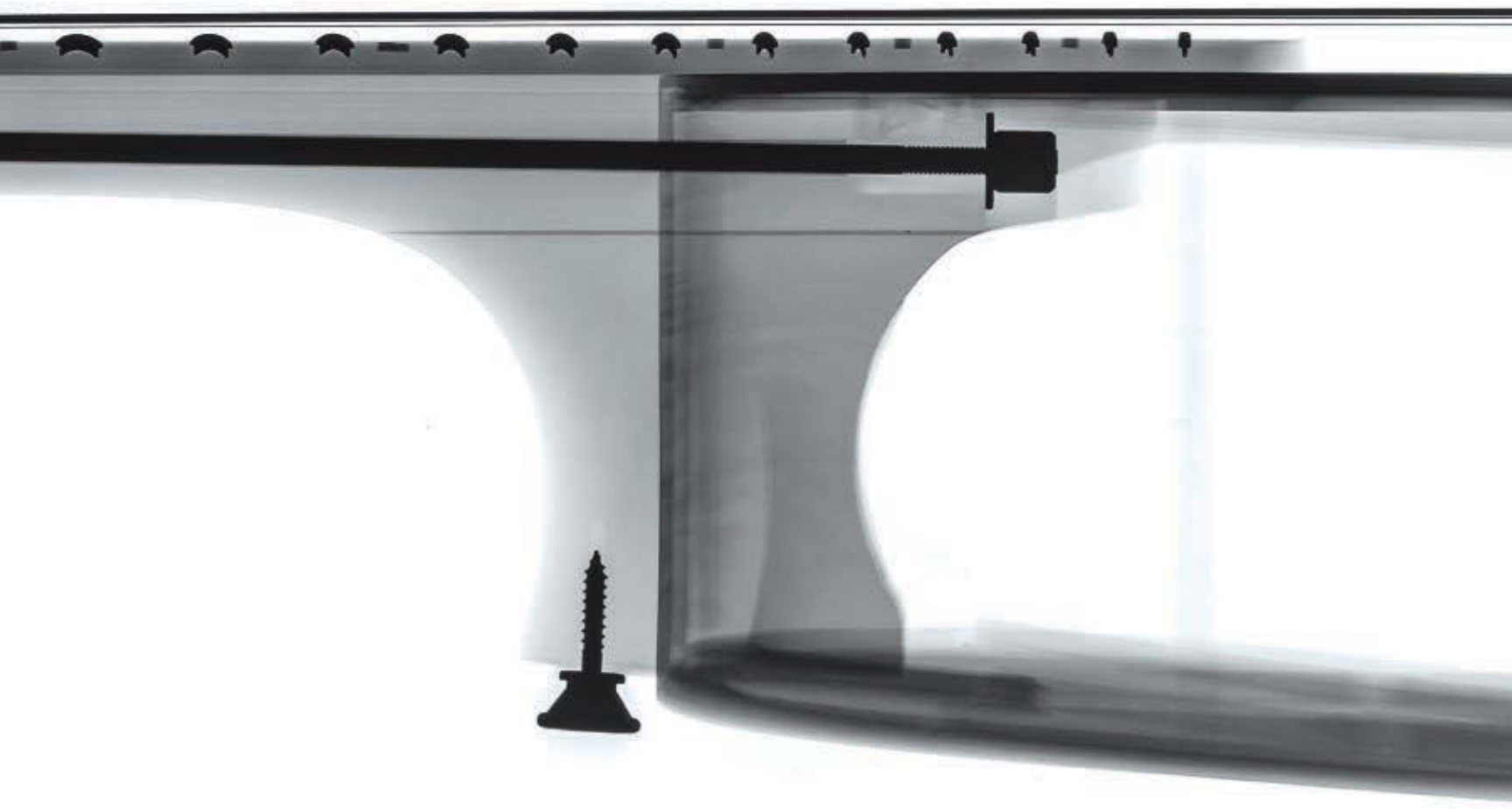

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Exploring the Tele Pickup Palette

BY DIRK WACKER

Previously we discussed a handful of problems that might be affecting your Telecaster tone, and then looked at solutions to each of these issues that didn't involve replacing pickups ["Before You Swap Out Those Tele Pickups ... ," March 2014]. Okay, suppose you've gone through your setup, strings, electronics, and hardware, and you still sense there's something missing sonically. Now it's time to start thinking about replacing the pickups.

Most companies offer Tele pickups based on a somewhat standardized palette that has developed over the years as the instrument itself has evolved. So to make an educated purchase, it helps to understand this palette and know where your favorite sounds might be found on it. Once you know the basics of Tele pickup history and construction, you'll be able to make sense of the vast array of replacement pickups available to you.

So let's start with the bridge pickup and examine how it was constructed when it was first introduced. Here's a basic description of that original model: a traditional single-coil with a pentagonal back plate, six alnico magnets, and a soft iron base plate. But since its inception, the bridge pickup has been about change. Let's check out three categories.

Fifties lap steel. Leo Fender loved the sound of lap steel guitar, and when he designed the Telecaster, his goal was to bring lap steel tone to a standard electric guitar. So it's no wonder that Fender's first Tele bridge pickups were based on his own lap steel pickups.

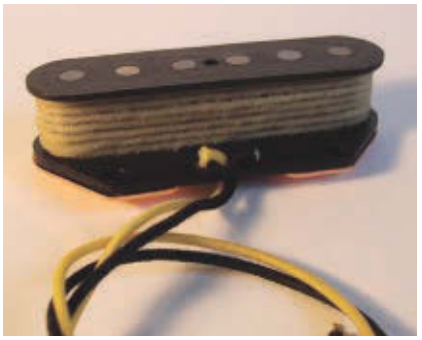
In fact, there's a history of players transplanting actual lap steel pickups into their Teles. This became a famous mod when Keith Richards' guitar tech, Pierre de Beauport, put Fender Champion lap steel pickups into Richards' blackguard Teles. This might sound easy, but it isn't! Lap steel pickups have a rectangular base plate and they do not fit into a standard Telecaster bridge pickup body cavity, nor will they attach to a standard Tele bridge. You have to convert them to make them fit. I've seen handmade adapters, rerouted Telecaster bodies, and custom bridges all designed to house this type of pickup. Fortunately, today there are replacement lap steel-style pickups designed to accommodate the Telecaster's hardware and routing. So if you're after this type of pickup, you can have it in a plug-and-play configuration.

How does it sound? Clear as a bell when playing clean. Its singing tone has rich harmonics and overtones and a lot of high end. It's a very good choice for country, rockabilly, and swing, yet a lot of jazz players like this one too. It can easily get too trebly on a Tele, especially on a fundamentally bright instrument. Using pure nickel strings and a darker-sounding tone cap can help a lot. I also recommend installing 250k pots and adjusting the pickup a tad deeper than standard.

In overdrive mode, this pickup works perfectly with all Tube Screamer-inspired stompboxes because their natural midrange hump is the perfect addition to the pickup's bright tone—one that can never get lost in the mix. Hey, if Keith uses these pickups, what else can you say?

Broadcaster/Nocaster. These are Leo Fender's first Telecaster pickups. In comparison to the lap steel pickup, Fender used larger-diameter pole pieces, a different wire, and of course, a metal base plate underneath the pickup. This results in a little bit more output, a snarly midrange, and outstanding sustain—all without losing that twangy and slightly nasal character so many players love.

A Broadcaster/Nocaster pickup sounds raw and loud, and some even approach the P-90 ballpark sonically. I have to admit it's my favorite Tele pickup. You can create real twang monsters with this type of pickup, especially if you're into chicken pickin'. Compared to the lap steel-style pickup, overdrive sounds beefier and louder, and this underlines the Broadcaster/Nocaster's rowdy character. It's a great pickup for country, blues, and rockabilly, and it can bring a fundamentally bright guitar to heel within seconds and make it sound just right.



The flush poles reveal this pickup's old-school roots.

Fifties vintage. This is the most common pickup you'll find in vintage-flavored Teles. It has raised D and G pole pieces, and this was the first time Fender did that. This pickup delivers a bright and twangy tone that can be biting and penetrating, and it offers even more high-end than the lap steel type. So 250k pots and a high-capacitance tone cap, together with cloth-covered wire is recommended. Also, never put this pickup on a basswood or maple body—too bright.

With the right body wood, thicker pure nickel strings, and mellower '50s-style electronics, this pickup type is the key for the vintage tone we all know from our old vinyl records (think "Bakersfield"). This pickup was used for almost all musical styles and defined a whole era, and it's also a perfect match for all tweed-era amps. Even when using overdrive, you'll never get lost in the mix, so a pedal with warm midrange is recommended.

Next month our journey through the world of Telecaster replacement pickups continues. Until then, keep on modding!

DIRK WACKER *lives in Germany where he plays country, rockabilly, and surf music in two bands, works regularly as a session musician for a local studio, and writes for several guitar mags. He's also a hardcore guitar and amp DIY-er who runs an extensive website on the subject (singlecoil.com).*

Photo courtesy of LeoSounds Pickups (leosounds.de)

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The Vibro Champ Voltage Mystery

BY JEFF BOBER

Q: **Hi Jeff,**
I recently acquired a 1972 Fender Vibro Champ, and after trolling the web discovered that there were actually two circuits used in the Vibro Champ: AA764 and AB764. I believe most people think that only the AA764 circuit was used in these amps, but from the schematic, it seems the AB764 circuit appeared around 03/24/71. The AB764 circuit contains changes to the (higher) voltages used in the amp, and also a cap can change from a 20-20-20 can to a 40-20-20 can. Do you know if all the 1972 and later Vibro Champs used the AB764 schematic? Is there any way to tell whether a Vibro Champ uses the AA or AB version of the circuit without opening it up?
Tom
Olathe, KS

A: **Hi Tom,**
I searched extensively but could not locate a schematic with the number AB764 specific to the Vibro Champ—all I found was the usual AA764. The other schematic you reference, AB764, was actually for the Bronco amp. The Bronco was essentially a Vibro Champ with a different name. The Bronco name appeared on the front panel in red rather than the usual blue, and the amp was packaged with the Bronco guitar as a beginner's set sometime around 1967. That said, let's see if there are any explanations for the differences between these schematics.

The schematic for the CBS-era Vibro Champ shows the main B+ voltage at the first power supply filter cap as 355V DC. This is supposedly achieved with a 5Y3 rectifier tube using a mains transformer with part number 125P1B. The plate voltage of the 6V6 output tube is stated as 342V DC, giving us a 13V drop across the output transformer primary, which is certainly possible.

The pre-CBS AA764 Champ schematic shows a 5Y3 and P1B mains transformer, with a B+ voltage of 360V DC and plate voltage of 350V DC—very similar to the CBS Vibro Champ.

Meanwhile the Bronco schematic shows the voltage at the first power supply filter cap as 420V DC. Keep in mind that this is supposedly while using the same 5Y3 rectifier and same 125P1B mains transformer as the CBS-era Vibro Champ, though if everything else in the amp is the same, this is theoretically impossible. Also, the stated plate voltage of 342V DC indicates a voltage drop of 78V across the primary of the output transformer. If that was truly the case in a (semi) functioning amplifier, my initial diagnosis would be a bad output transformer. Let's just assume that someone forgot to update a few numbers here.

I'm not sure there's a hard, factual explanation, though I do have a theory. To explain, let's look at the era's Princeton amp, which uses the same mains transformer as the era's Champ and Vibro Champ. Perhaps the engineers at Fender decided at some point to design a double-duty transformer, one that could supply the needed voltage for a Champ with a 5Y3, but with sufficient current to supply a Princeton and the increased voltage output from its GZ34 rectifier.

The schematic and layout diagram hint at transformer redesign. Notice how in the Bronco schematic, there's an internal "shield" lead added to the transformer. This is also indicated on the physical layout diagram for the Bronco by the addition of an orange lead to the mains transformer. So while the part number of the Champ and Vibro Champ transformer never changed, there may have been a redesign resulting in increased voltage.

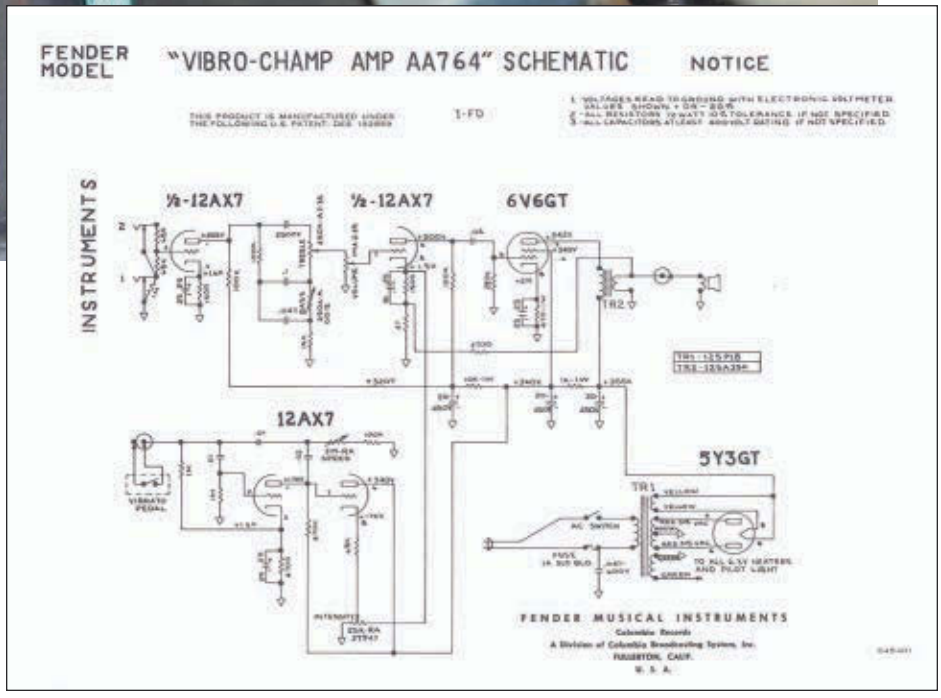
This is pure conjecture, though the belief that there are Champ amps with different B+ voltages seems to be shared by some aftermarket transformer manufacturers, who offer replacement transformers with selectable secondary taps for higher or lower B+ voltages.

Can you tell which version you have without disassembling the unit? Maybe. The only externally visible clue may be

WARNING:
All tube amplifiers contain lethal voltages. The most dangerous voltages are stored in electrolytic capacitors, even after the amp has been unplugged from the wall. Before you touch anything inside the amp chassis, it's imperative that these capacitors are discharged. If you are unsure of this procedure, consult your local amp tech.

the capacitor. If you can see the side of the large silver filter capacitor mounted on the underside of the chassis (this may require a flashlight and a mirror), you should be able to read the capacitance and voltage of each section written on the side. The first line will either say 20 µF or 40 µF (**Fig. 1**). If it's 40, you might have the later, higher-voltage version, even though Princeton amps of the same era with the same mains transformer use a 20 µF cap in this position.

You'll get a more definitive answer if you measure the voltage at pin 8 of the rectifier tube. Connect the negative lead of a voltmeter to a ground point. (Any point on the chassis will do.) Carefully pull the rectifier tube just slightly from its firmly seated position in the socket, just enough to let the voltmeter's positive lead touch the pin (**Fig. 2**).



Here you can measure the initial power supply voltage. In this instance, on a unit with the 40 µF cap, you can see I've measured 409V DC, which is neither the lower or higher power supply voltage stated on the schematics! Bottom line: It remains a mystery.

JEFF BOBER, *is one of the godfathers of the low-wattage amp revolution. He co-founded and was originally the principal designer for Budda Amplification, though he launched EAST Amplification (eastamplification.com) in 2010. You can catch his podcasts at ampsandaxescast.com or email him at pgampman@gmail.com.*

Cleansing the Doors of Perception

BY BEN FULTON

"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."

So wrote William Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. A smart man, no doubt, with a fascinating observation about how we interact with the universe: We limit ourselves by dogma and consequently miss out on many, many goodies.

Goodies are good. We all like goodies. According to Blake, there are many goodies in front of us, just waiting to be plucked, but we can't see them and therefore miss out. We don't see the whole picture.

I agree.

Well and good, you may say, but what in Boba Fett's name does this have to do with guitar pedals? The answer is: everything.

Back in Time

Pretend it's 1990. I'm about to turn 15. Over the previous eight months I've developed an unhealthy fixation with the guitar and all thing associated with it. I purchase Ralf Denyer's *The Guitar Handbook* and absorb many facets of the great mystery. As my birthday approaches I scour the local paper's "For Sale" section and am finally rewarded: "Guitar effects pedals for sale." My ever-patient father drives me the 45-minute journey out into the middle of nowhere to purchase three devices: a light blue Ibanez "script" phaser (wonderful), a Turbo Rat (heinous—light years from the glory of the standard Rat I would later come to know and love), and finally, a giant orange DOD Flanger.

I had an idea what the phaser did—my father's Dire Straits records opened that door. I knew about overdrive, so I understood the Turbo Rat. But the Flanger? What the hell did *that* do? I had no point of reference. "Regen" ... *What*? This lack of knowledge or preconception led me to sit with guitar, amp, and pedal and just play—feeling it out, experiencing the sonic unknown, and letting it lead me on a merry jaunt. Marvelous. Having no preconceptions meant my mind was open to all possibilities. I was not viewing it "thro' narrow chinks of my cavern."

Too Much Information?

Today's world is one of information overload. It can feel like nothing is unknown. Apparently all mysteries can be Wikipedia'd or explained via a YouTube clip. Every forum has myriad members who seem to know all the answers.

Today's equipment purchases generally involve research—gaining a feel for the various products offered in our area of interest. Looking for fuzz pedals, for example, might involve weeks of viewing YouTube demos and reading endless forum threads and magazine reviews. We watch/listen/read to learn the pros on cons of Pedal X vs. Pedal Y.

But remember the time where this was not the case. When people tried out something new and unknown with no preconceptions, no bias. Imagine when Jimi Hendrix tried out Roger Mayer's Octavia, or Jimmy Page tried the Tone Bender, or Keith tried the Maestro Fuzz-Tone. How would *they* have approached these sonic tools? Certainly not with the cart before the horse! They would have explored, played, twiddled, and tweaked till something felt interesting, cool, or magical. Till something started appearing. Open minds and ears open doors to … goodies. Just listen to "Foxy Lady," "Dazed and Confused," or "Satisfaction."

Strange things happen in the world we now live in. I recall posting a four-minute clip of a prototype pedal I'd designed. This clip was reposted on a number of forums, and soon there were comments from people discussing its pros and cons in depth. Surreal, considering no one other than me had played through it. And yet people were so assured of their opinions that they were comfortable passing judgment on something they'd not played through.

Imagine if Jimi had adopted that attitude! "Yeah, sorry man, but uh, you know … I already have one modulation effect. I kinda know how they all sound."

Embrace the Mystery

As creators we have a responsibility to embrace the mystery anywhere we can find it. Let us open our minds and welcome the infinite with open arms. Let's suck the marrow out of everything that comes our way. Everything has potential.

My challenge to you, dear reader, is to go over to your guitar rig, plug everything in, and start fiddling. Change all your settings. Plunge into the unknown. Set aside everything you know and use your ears to navigate the void.

"Well, I'm bold, bold as love … I'm bold as love … just ask the axis."

BEN FULTON *is a Libran. He likes long walks on the beach and loves watching the sun set. He likes going out dancing but is just as happy to cuddle up in front of the fire with a good movie and glass of Pinot. He also is the CEO and head designer at Red Witch Analog Pedals.*

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NAMM REPORT

28 Axes, Amps & Stomps to Watch for in 2014

For hardcore guitar and bass gear junkies, life can pretty much be divided into two main eras: pre- and post-NAMM awareness. Before we know about the semi-annual gathering of instrument, pedal, and amp makers flaunting their new wares, we're content messing around with whatever gear they've got at the local shop, completely oblivious to whether the products were even conceived in the current decade. Pre-NAMM minds are like pure, innocent baby brains in some ways—perfectly happy in their ignorance.

But once NAMM enters our consciousness—whether via word of mouth from more experienced players or one of *PG*'s many demo videos from the show—we're kind of ruined for life: No matter how good our rigs, no matter how little money in our bank account, tales of the event inspire visions of unfettered gluttony. We fantasize over and over about what it would be like to stroll the aisles and ogle, fondle, and generally lust after the tone gizmos debuting there.

As with all idyllic mental constructs, NAMM fantasies are missing a few sobering realities. But even when you take into account the 150-decibel mayhem of hundreds of drummers bashing away simultaneously, even when you consider the inability of some players to tune an instrument, even when you acknowledge that the 10 quadrillion notes flying by your ear flaps only occasionally hint at musical consciousness, there's *still* no arguing that, hands down, NAMM is infinitely better than a convention for insurance brokers, accountants, mortuary workers, or pretty much any other industry.

So if you haven't yet been to the January show in Anaheim or the mid-summer show in Nashville, keep that dream alive. The potent blend of gear that's barely off the workbench and the abundant visual and audible spectacles add up to one gloriously fun, occasionally hilarious or befuddling adventure. In the meantime, here's our summary of the most intriguing and fantastic-sounding gear from the Winter 2014 NAMM show held January 23–26 at the Anaheim Convention Center. There's more cool gear than this, of course, but there's only so much space here, so be sure to check out the 120 or so videos we shot at the show on **premierguitar.com** or **youtube.com/premierguitar**.

—Shawn Hammond

Look for the this icon to see a **video demo** at **premierguitar.com** or **youtube.com/premierguitar**.

Guitars

▲ **ARISTIDES** 070 7-String
Aristides Instruments brought its first 7-string axe to Anaheim. The 070 features the company's proprietary Arium composite for the neck and body, while the fretboard is ebony. Available options include Seymour Duncan, Bare Knuckle, or EMG pickups, and Hipshot hardtail or a Floyd Rose bridge. Prices start at $2,900 street.
aristidesinstruments.com

◀ **(FAR LEFT) AXL** USA BelAir
The rad new BelAir is assembled in the States and has a slab mahogany body, a Bigsby B5, and a splittable TV Jones Power'Tron pickup for $749 street.
axlguitars.com

◀ **CORDOBA** D11-CE
Outfitted with a solid Sitka spruce top, solid acacia back and sides, ebony fretboard and bridge, hybrid X/fan bracing, and the new AFS II piezo/internal mic system, the D11-CE goes for $1,049 street—with hardshell case.
cordobaguitars.com

Guitars

▼ FANO Alt De Facto RB6

This beautiful mutation unites Rickenbacker, Kay, and Jazzmaster cues, including Lollar Gold Foil pickups, Mastery bridge and vibrato, and checkerboard binding. $2,695 street.
fanoguitars.com

▲ GIBSON J-15

The J-15 is a very cool variation on the classic slope-shoulder J-45 shape. It features walnut back and sides, Sitka spruce top, and a street price of around $1,500.
gibson.com

WHAT DO THESE GREAT PLAYERS HAVE IN COMMON?

ALEX LIFESON
Rush

The quality of all the FX is superb... Great depth and transparency. Take it for a test drive, you won't be disappointed. Das Awesome.

STEVE VAI
Solo Artist

The introduction of the Ultra was akin to the invention of the wheel... The Axe-Fx II is like having four wheels and racing into the abyss.

JOHN PETRUCCI
Dream Theater

The Axe-Fx II has become irreplaceable on stage and in the studio for me and is truly a gift of inspiration for the modern guitar player.

DWEEZIL ZAPPA
Zappa Plays Zappa

The Axe-Fx II is all I use for amp and cab tones, both live and in the studio. It is a quantum leap—a major milestone in guitar technology.

STEVE STEVENS
Billy Idol
Atomic Playboys

Awesome! Really impressed with the dynamics of the new update. Great work! I'd be lost without it in my studio.

GUTHRIE GOVAN
The Aristocrats, etc.

The sound and feel of this magic box are so "real" that witchcraft would appear to be the only logical explanation... Most pleasing!

NEAL SCHON
Journey, Solo Artist

I've tried every modeller on this planet and Fractal is miles ahead in every area. It's also flawlessly dependable on stage + in the studio.

BRIAN NUTTER
Keith Urban

The Axe-Fx II is simply the most useful and flexible tone tool you could ever have. It's like the thing is custom made for every guitar player.

STEF CARPENTER
Deftones

The Axe-Fx II is a transcendental experience for those who love developing tones... We have found a life partner in this system.

HERSHEL YATOVITZ
Chris Isaak

Matches and even beats old school. They captured all the nuance, mojo and fidelity... It is soulful, rich and alive. This is the new real thing.

PETE THORN
Chris Cornell
Melissa Etheridge

The Axe FX is a mainstay of my rig. No matter how I use it live or in the studio, it always delivers stunning results.

FREDRIK THORENDAL
Meshuggah

I simply can't believe the Axe-Fx II sounds as good as it does. I can't stop playing once I start. (Check out the new THORENDAL amp models!)

MISHA MANSOOR
Periphery

The Axe-Fx II is way beyond just amp modeling or effects processing! This is is the new standard for guitarists... The new "must have."

TOSIN ABASI
Animals As Leaders

The Axe Fx II inspires me to create sounds that transcend the conventional guitar amp. I consider it another instrument, and indispensable.

DEVIN TOWNSEND
Devin Townsend Project

You've heard rumors about this alien black box? Believe them! My recent records and live sound are direct Axe-Fx. Future now.

CHRIS BRODERICK
Megadeth

Unbelievable on every level! The flexibility is so great that every player on earth could have one and I'd still be able to have my own unique tone.

AXE-FX II

REAL TUBE AMP SOUND AND FEEL ▪ 130+ BUILT-IN AMP MODELS WITH MIMIC™ TECHNOLOGY
ONBOARD "TONE MATCHING" & CAB "IR" TOOLS LET YOU CAPTURE/CREATE ANY TONE
260+ OF THE INDUSTRY'S BEST STOMP & STUDIO EFFECTS INCLUDING 25+ DRIVE PEDALS
QUICK & EASY TO DIAL IN ▪ PRO I/O & RELIABILITY ▪ MAC/PC EDITOR ▪ AND MORE!

Editors Guitar Player Pick

PG PremierGuitar PREMIER GEAR

FRACTAL AUDIO SYSTEMS
www.fractalaudio.com

Guitar World Platinum Award

Guitarist GOLD

Guitars

▼ MCPHERSON Kevin Michael Carbon Fiber Travel Guitar

McPherson Guitars launched its new Kevin Michael brand under the direction of Composite Acoustics founder Ellis Seal. The first model is a travel guitar with all-composite construction that needs no truss rod, has an L.R. Baggs Element system, and sounds incredibly full-bodied acoustically or plugged in. Street price will be around $2,000.

mcphersonguitars.com/kevinmichael

▲ PAUL RHONEY Oceana DuoTone

Luthier Paul Rhoney made his first NAMM appearance this year and wowed us with his Oceana DuoTone. The 24 5/8"-scale guitar features a Spanish cedar body and neck, Indian rosewood fretboard, Roadhouse pickups built to old Supro pickup specs, and a bridge and new Jazzmaster-style vibrato from Mastery. It goes for $3,000.

paulrhoneyguitars.com

RICKENBACKER
330W Walnut
Rick has a whole new Walnut series that features a thin oil that finish gives the bodies a luxurious, natural aura, and the all-maple necks create a striking contrast. The series includes the 360-12W, 4003W, and 330W.
rickenbacker.com

Guitars

▼ TRAVIS BEAN DESIGNS TB

Glorious resurrection! Kevin Burkett of Electrical Guitar Company and Rita Bean have joined forces in Travis Bean Designs. The new TB has an African mahogany top, rosewood fretboard, alnico 5 high-output humbuckers, and a full rear T7075-T651 aluminum pan assembly with a final machined weight of three pounds. $6,999 street.
travisbeandesigns.com

▲ WASHBURN Ola Englund PX-SOLAR6DLX

The PX-Solar Deluxe is just one of the many Parallaxe guitars introduced at NAMM. The signature guitars for the former Six Feet Under axeman are available in alder-bodied 6- and 7-string models outfitted with EverTune bridges, ebony fretboards, a graphite nut, Seymour Duncan '59 neck and Custom 5 bridge pickups, and locking Grover 18:1 tuners.
washburn.com

Amps

DIEZEL Lil Fokker

The new 100-watt Lil Fokker is Diezel's simplest design to date. Powered by a quartet of KT77s, it features clean and dirty channels, a series effects loop, and a two-button footswitch for switching channels or between two different master volumes. $2,499 street.
diezelamplification.com

HIWATT Custom Little D

The handwired, U.K.-made Hiwatt Custom Little D head uses two EL84 power tubes and is switchable from 20 watts to 1/2 watt, and features normal and brilliant inputs—or one that links both for hotter tones.
hiwatt.com

Amps

▲ ORANGE Dual Dark Terror

The 2-channel Dual Dark series consists of EL34-driven 50- and 100-watt heads. Both feature power reduction—the 50 streets for $2,299 and can go down to 25 watts, while the bigger devil goes for $2,499 can be calmed down to 70, 50, or 30 watts. Yes, these Oranges only come in black.
orangeamps.com

◀ SUPRO 1624T Dual-Tone

The 1624T Dual-Tone features a pair of 6973 power tubes, two channels with volume and tone knobs, a tremolo circuit, and a custom 12" speaker voiced to capture a 1960s Jensen vibe. Input one sends the signal through both preamps, while input 2 operates as a single preamp. Street price is $1,099.
suprousa.com

▼ TONE KING Majesty 45

Tone King's Mark Bartel spent last year in a British state of mind and emerged with a few new amps, including the beautiful EL34-driven Majesty 45. It's tricked out with a specially voiced attenuator and a 2x12 cab with custom Eminence 60-watt speakers. The head goes for $2,695 street, while the combo is $2,995.

toneking.com

▲ TRAYNOR YBA-1Mod1

The YBA-1Mod1 comes in response to the popularity of the LE 50th-anniversary YBA-1 unveiled by Traynor last year. The class-AB, EL34-powered beast has a four-knob EQ—treble, bass, and high- and low-rang "expander" knobs—and its two channels can be run in parallel or series (by pulling channel two's volume knob). It's also capable of running at 40, 20, 5, 1, or 0.1 watts. $649 street.

traynoramps.com

Effects

▲ EARTHQUAKER DEVICES Pitch Bay and Terminal

The Pitch Bay—a three-part polyphonic harmonizer and distortion generator—and Terminal—EarthQuaker's take on a Shin Ei Companion fuzz—sound freakishly rad, as expected. The former goes for $225 and the latter for $165.

earthquakerdevices.com

▶ ELECTRO-HARMONIX Satisfaction Fuzz

Mike Matthews honored the importance of the Rolling Stones and the Maestro FZ-1 to his own career with the new Satisfaction fuzz. The best part? It'll have a street price around 53 bucks.

ehx.com

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Introducing the Recto®-Verb™ Twenty-Five, the new Reverb-enhanced Combo and Head version of our mighty Mini Rectifier®. Designed and Hand-Crafted in Petaluma, CA.

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Pedals

▲ EMPRESS Tremolo2

Empress' reinvented trem pedal has an all-analog signal path with incredibly powerful digital controls, including an innovative new multi-colored LED system for identifying up to eight presets, as well as a new control port that can be used with an external tap-tempo footswitch, an expression pedal (to control almost any function), or even with Empress' MIDI Box to recall presets or sync the pedal with time code. $249 street.
empresseffects.com

▼ JIM DUNLOP CM-95 Clyde McCoy Cry Baby Wah

Jim Dunlop brought several great new pedals to NAMM, including the Cry Baby CM-95 Clyde McCoy, which features a halo inductor for warm, rounded vintage tones that steer completely clear of icepick highs even with the toe all the way down. $199 street.
jimdunlop.com

▶ MODKITS Wahtz Wah

The new Wahtz Wah point-to-point kit aims to serve up classic wah sounds but with a little extra kick, and it goes for around 100 bucks.
modkitsdiy.com

▼ TECH 21 Fly Rig 5

In celebration of its 25th anniversary, Tech 21 unveiled the Fly Rig 5—a slim unit that allows you to access the sounds of five pedals: a SansAmp, reverb, delay, boost, and Plexi distortion. Even cooler, the transparent mini knobs for each effect illuminate when that effect is engaged. $249 street.
tech21nyc.com

▲ WALRUS AUDIO Descent

The Descent's reverb goes from lush, dreamy soundscapes to twisted and trippy. Modes include hall, reverse, and shimmer, and -1 and +1 knobs that add low and high octaves to the reverberations. There are three available presets, plus manual mode. Jacks include a mono input, stereo outs, and an expression-pedal input that lets you control reverb time or wet mix. $300 street.
walrusaudio.com

◀ Z.VEX Fat Fuzz Probe

The Fat Fuzz Probe's theremin control governs the stab parameter, and there are also drive, comp, gate, and volume knobs, as well as a 3-position voicing toggle for standard Fuzz Factory sounds, and "deep" and "deeper" subharmonic modes. It'll be available in late summer for $369 street.
zvex.com

Bass Gear

▲ ASHDOWN PiBass 240

The new PiBass 240 is an über-compact and light (7.7 pounds) 240-watt digital amp with a 3-band semi-parametric EQ, a built-in DI, headphone jack, and passive/active input selector switch. $399 street.

ashdownmusic.com

▼ EBS Classic 500

The Swedish bass outfit's new Classic 500 solid-state head features myriad EQ options, an input gain knob with clipping LED, separate overdrive control, and pre- and post-EQ DI—all for $999 street.

ebssweden.com

▼ ZON Mosaic Mojo

Zon showed off its new Mosaic Mojo basses, which are outfitted with Aguilar 60's-series J-style pickups, come in three electronics configurations, and start at only $899.

zonguitars.com

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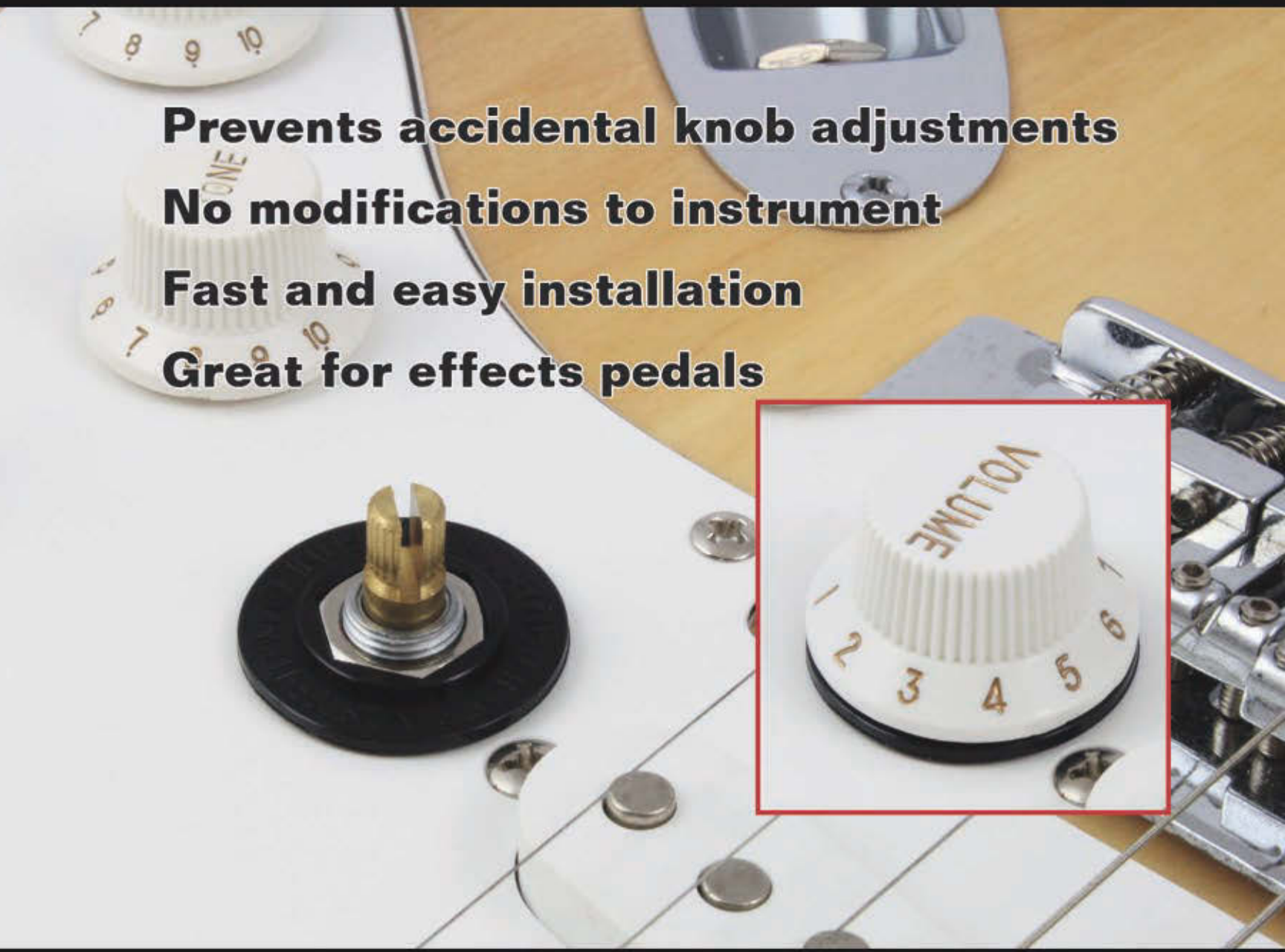

Prevents accidental knob adjustments

No modifications to instrument

Fast and easy installation

Great for effects pedals

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MINIFOOGERS

100% ANALOG GUITAR PEDALS

DELAY • TREM • DRIVE • BOOST • RING • UNDER $200

moog

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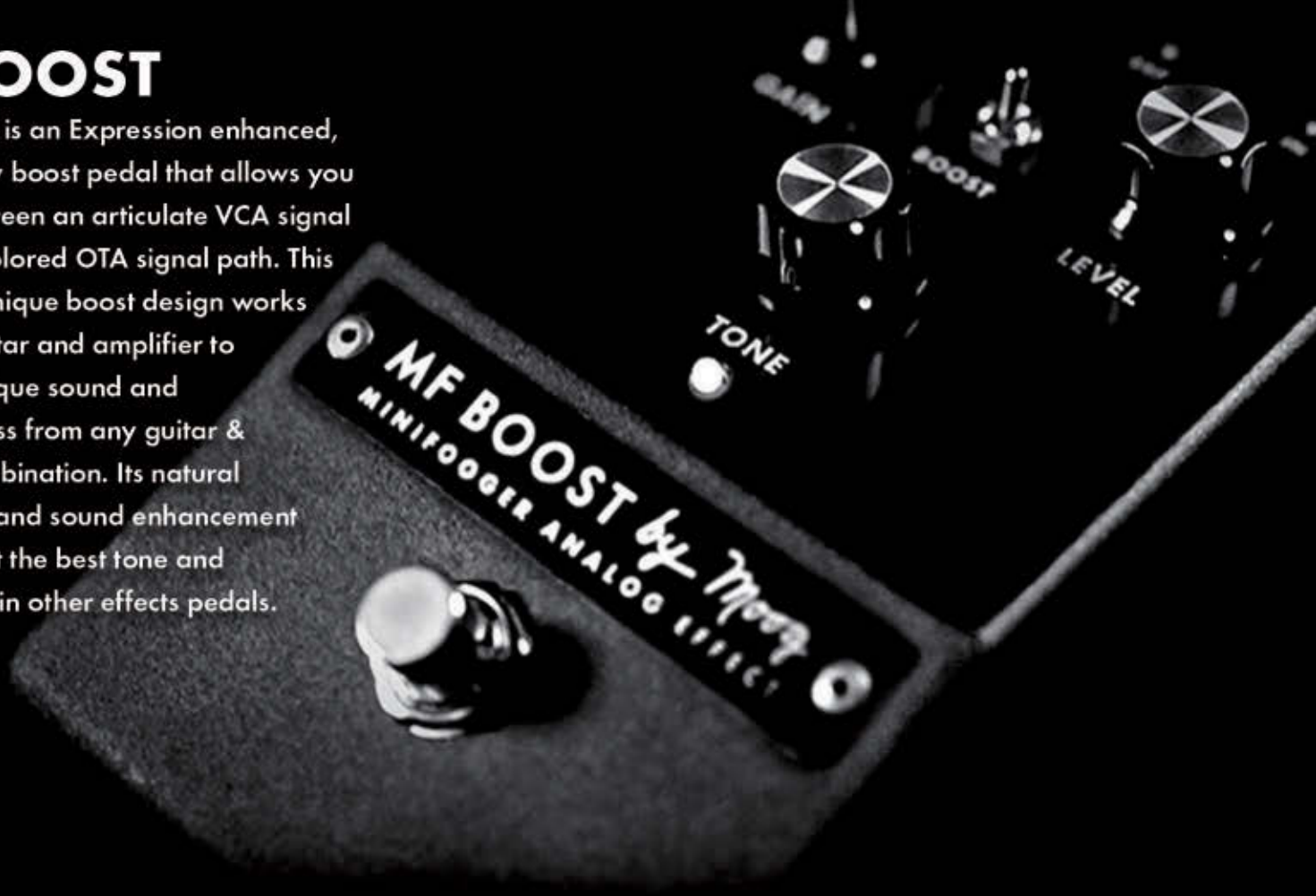
MF BOOST

The MF Boost is an Expression enhanced, twin topology boost pedal that allows you to select between an articulate VCA signal path and a colored OTA signal path. This completely unique boost design works with your guitar and amplifier to conjure boutique sound and responsiveness from any guitar & amplifier combination. Its natural compression and sound enhancement also bring out the best tone and performance in other effects pedals.



MF DRIVE

The MF Drive is a unique, filter-based overdrive pedal that employs a Moog Ladder Filter, boutique FET amplifiers, and classic OTAs in its drive section making it highly reactive to input gain and picking dynamics. The bi-polar tone control and sweep-able filter work with input gain to offer each player completely customizable sounds from creamy British overdrive to cranked American tube amplifier and even fuzz. When the filter Peak switch is engaged and an expression pedal is connected, the harmonic content is shifted to the filter's cutoff position adding tonal and dirty wah performance possibilities not found elsewhere.

moog

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MF RING

The MF Ring is an analog ring modulator that is based on the best selling Ring Mod in the world, the Moogerfooger MF-102. Its unique tone voicing circuit adds a new musical dimension to ring modification, making it easy dial in everything from octaves and choral dissonance to harmonic undertones and synthesized lead lines. The expression pedal input provides hands-free control of the Freq control for sound sweeps, pitch shifting effects, and playing between two scales on the fly. Unlike other ring modulation pedals, the MF Ring can also be battery powered.

MF TREM

The MF Trem is an analog tremolo pedal based around a balanced modulator and Sub Audio VCO. This unique design creates a wide range of tremolo effects that are based on phase cancellation and addition. Create classic optical and hard tremolo effects that are reactive to harmonic content, or push up the depth control and shift into the beginnings of lush phasing and chorus. The variable Shape control interacts directly with Tone and Mix to craft subtle swells and gallops to rhythmic percussive, and swirling effects. An expression pedal input adds control over tremolo Speed for beautiful, hands-free swells and rotary effects.

moog

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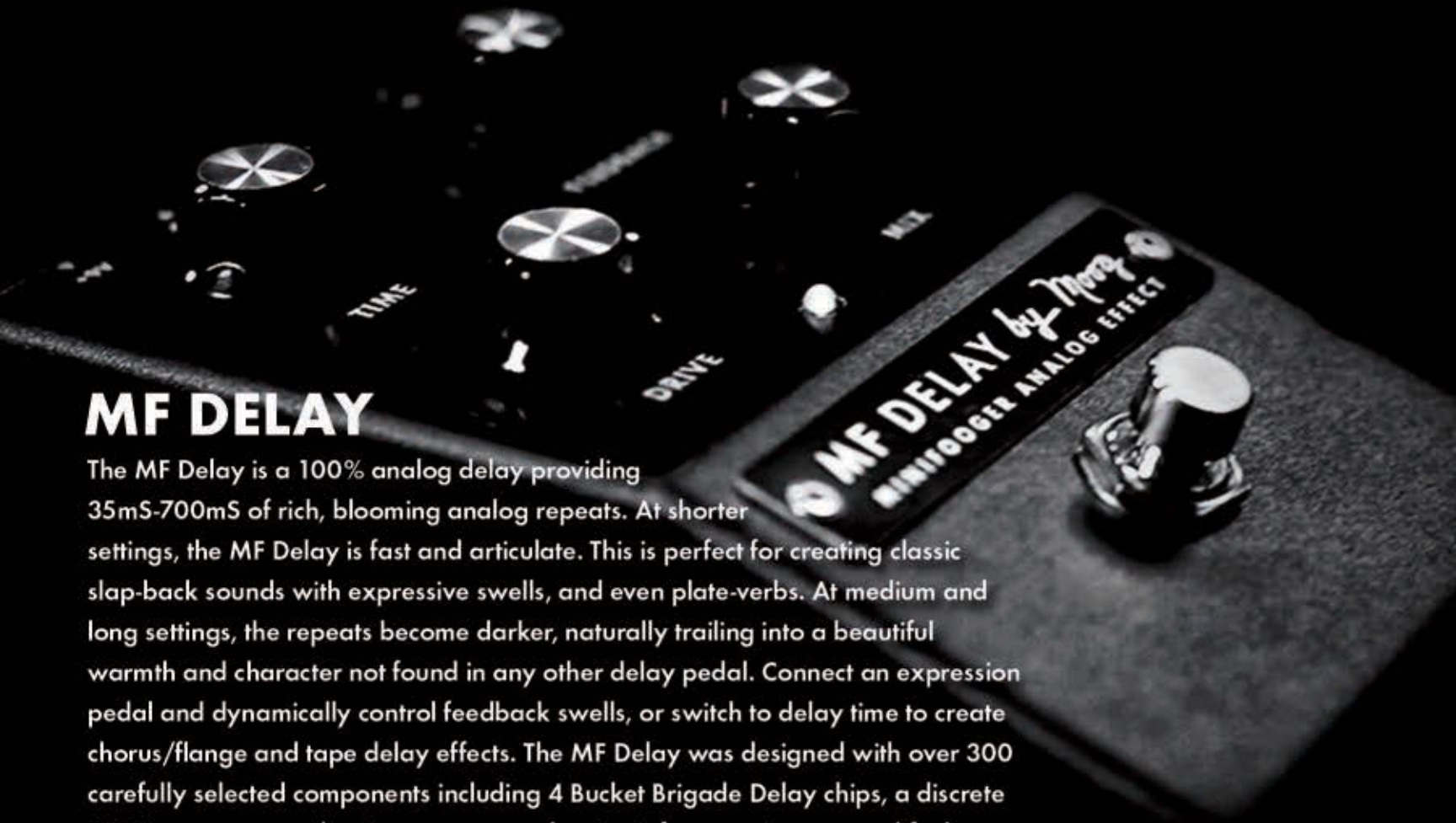

MF DELAY

The MF Delay is a 100% analog delay providing 35mS-700mS of rich, blooming analog repeats. At shorter settings, the MF Delay is fast and articulate. This is perfect for creating classic slap-back sounds with expressive swells, and even plate-verbs. At medium and long settings, the repeats become darker, naturally trailing into a beautiful warmth and character not found in any other delay pedal. Connect an expression pedal and dynamically control feedback swells, or switch to delay time to create chorus/flange and tape delay effects. The MF Delay was designed with over 300 carefully selected components including 4 Bucket Brigade Delay chips, a discrete JFET input stage, and a vintage compander circuit for superior tone and feel.

INTRODUCING MINIFOOGERS

Queens of The Stone Age guitarist, Troy Van Leeuwen, explores the fundamental capabilities of all 5 Minifooger Analog Effects Pedals. Each Minifooger is assembled by hand at the Moog factory in downtown Ashville, NC in a rugged, cast aluminum enclosure and features a 100% analog signal path, true bypass design, optional battery power, and a single expression pedal input that provides hands-free control of one specified parameter.

moog

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LINE 6
POD HD Pro X

By Joe Charupakorn

If you've recorded or performed during the past 15 years, you've probably encountered the Line 6 POD in some form. The amp modeler/multi-effects unit helped revolutionize home recording, packing hundreds of sounds in that little bean-shaped enclosure. Line 6 recently released the X series, upgraded versions of their flagship POD HD Pro and HD500 models. The POD HD Pro X is a rack-mountable, all-inclusive guitar system that puts scores of cool sounds at your disposal.

The X Factor

The HD Pro X is built around the same models and algorithms as previous versions, but packs more processing horsepower, which is helpful, because complicated dual-amp setups and processor-intensive effects like reverb and pitch-shifting can hog processing power. The POD HD Pro X can create ultra-complex rigs that make Steve Vai's layered, harmonized sounds seem as simple as a Tube Screamer, and the unit won't flinch.

Studio in a Box

The POD HD Pro X features an extensive list of amp models based on such usual suspects as Fender blackface Deluxe Reverb, Marshall JTM-45 MkII, Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier, and Vox AC-15, plus some boutique offerings as a Dr. Z Route 66 and a Divided by 13 JRT 9/15. There are more than 100 effects derived from Line 6's M-series stompbox modelers, including a 48-second looper. You can use up to eight effects simultaneously.

The POD HD Pro X offers connectivity for just about any situation. The rear panel hosts MIDI, USB, and XLR mic jacks, as well as an effect loop with line/instrument-level switch, a Variax input, and other ins and outs.

Cracking the Rack Code

Some players fear rack-based systems, with their cryptic knobs, scroll menus, and minute edit screens. While the HD Pro X isn't

Extensive I/O complement

as hard to decipher as other units I've encountered, you can only cram so much onto a front panel before knobs have to share functions. Here, the tone-shaping controls (drive, volume, master, bass, mid, treble, and presence) are located on the right side of the panel, accessible without having to refer to the screen or the manual.

To go deeper, though, you must scroll through the menus. The default screen shows the signal chain as blocks of amps and effects, with icons signifying amp or effect type. A four-way button navigates the blocks. Below the screen are four numbered knobs that correspond to such functions as choosing amps and effects and changing parameters on the selected virtual component.

The POD HD Pro X's presets sound great right out of the box and require only minor tweaks.

Analog-style amplifier controls

Editing and navigating on the POD HD Pro X are manageable, but to be honest, it can feel like a chore. Downloading Line 6's free POD HD Pro X Edit software, however, makes edits a *lot* more fun. The software lets you use your computer to configure and edit your virtual rig, though all audio processing still occurs within the HD Pro X. Building a rig is much easier on a computer screen—you simply choose amps and effects and drag them into place. The sheer ease of maneuvering effects and amps onscreen led me to experiment with combinations I never would have tried if I'd had to physically route cables and rearrange hardware.

The ability to run two contiguous rigs simultaneously in dual-tone mode (and route the signals to separate output) opens the door to combinations that would be impossible—or at least impractical—with physical components.

My only complaint: Precise control of the virtual knobs is tricky using a laptop's trackpad, though you can enter precise values in the edit software by double-clicking and entering a value via number keys. Luckily, the keyboard's up/down arrows do work, so I used the track pad to get in the ballpark and fine-tuned from there. The HD Pro X's large memory (512 presets, organized as eight groups of 64 slots) makes it easy to go from project to project without reconfiguring for every new set of sounds.

Preset Notions

Some guitarists complain about the quality of modeler presets. To my ears, though,

many POD HD Pro X's presets sound great right out of the box and require only minor tweaks. The "Stereo Grind" and the EVH-inspired "Dutch Pasadenian" are great for lead sounds. If you prefer more buttery, vocal-sounding lead tones, "Singing Lead" and the Eric Johnson-inspired "Musicom" deliver in spades.

The POD HD Pro X offers a goldmine of exploratory possibilities. Quirky offerings like the ethereal "Namaste," and the *Twilight Zone*-esque "Starfire Unicorn" will appeal to textural guitarists. The "80's G-Synth" and "Vocal Synth" presets are cool for adding unusual colors to lead lines, and both track speedy lines really well. The "Slow Solo String" preset lends an almost Rhodes-like vibe to chords while adding a warm, string-like sound to sustained single notes.

Feelin' Like a Pro

Realistic-sounding amp models are more common these days—the trick is making the models *feel* real. On this front, the HD Pro X has controls for adjusting the sag, hum, bias, and bias excursion. Turning up the sag on the blackface Deluxe Reverb model, for instance, provides a more spongy and compressed feel that made it feel easier to play.

The Verdict

For the average guitarist, the convenience of the POD HD Pro X is hard to beat. Recording at home is often challenging unless you have a soundproofed studio. For example, I have a nice vintage Deluxe Reverb, but I can't crank it in my apartment without getting an angry knock from my neighbor. I also lack the high-end recording gear of a top studio. Chances are I can get better results recording a blackface tone direct via the POD HD Pro X.

At about $650, the POD HD Pro X costs less than some comparable units. Whether you use it as the heart of your guitar system or just to augment your current setup, the POD HD Pro X does a lot—and does it very well. PG

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this multi-effects unit at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

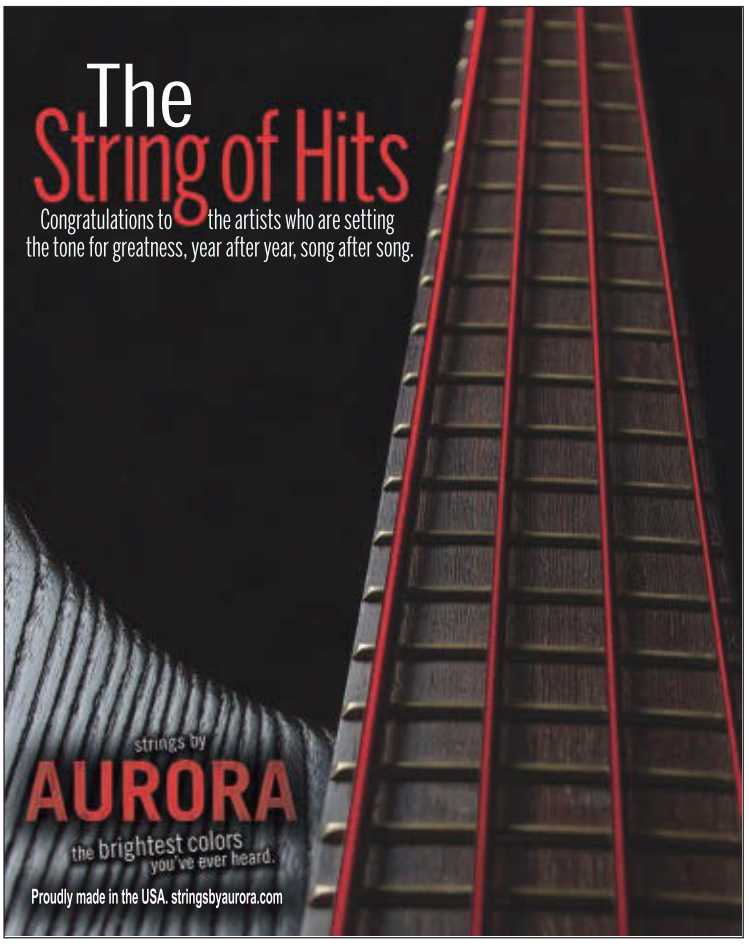
Line 6 POD HD Pro X

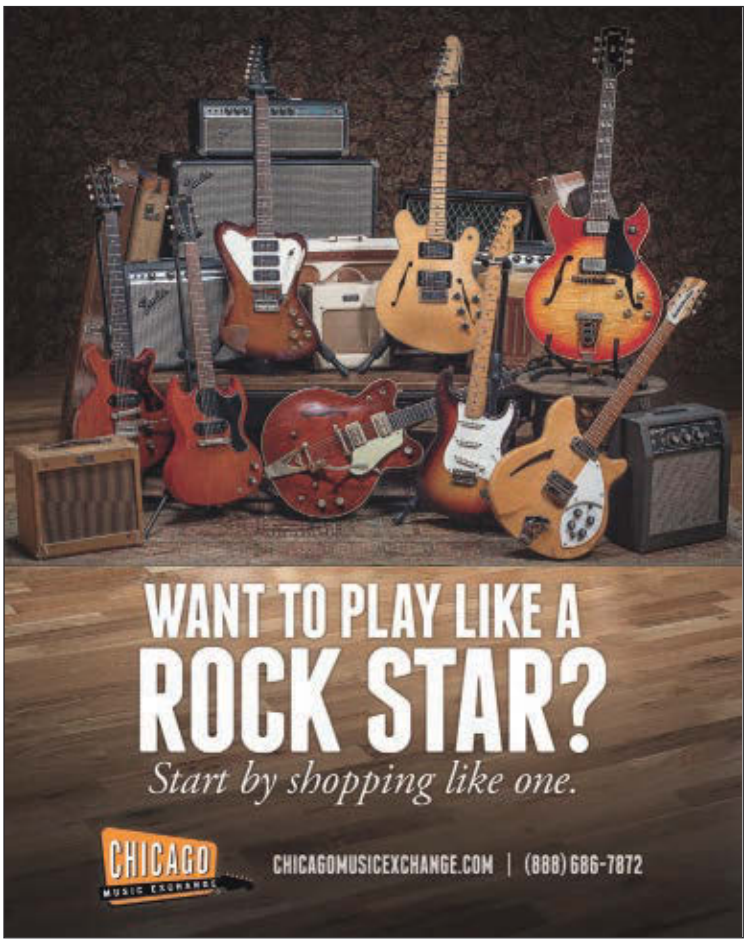
$650 street
line6.com

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	4
Build/Design	4.5
Value	4.5

PROS Excellent amp and effect sounds. Easy-to-use editing software.

CONS Tough to edit without a computer. Rack-mountable format not for everyone.





HIWATT

BIG BRITISH TONE

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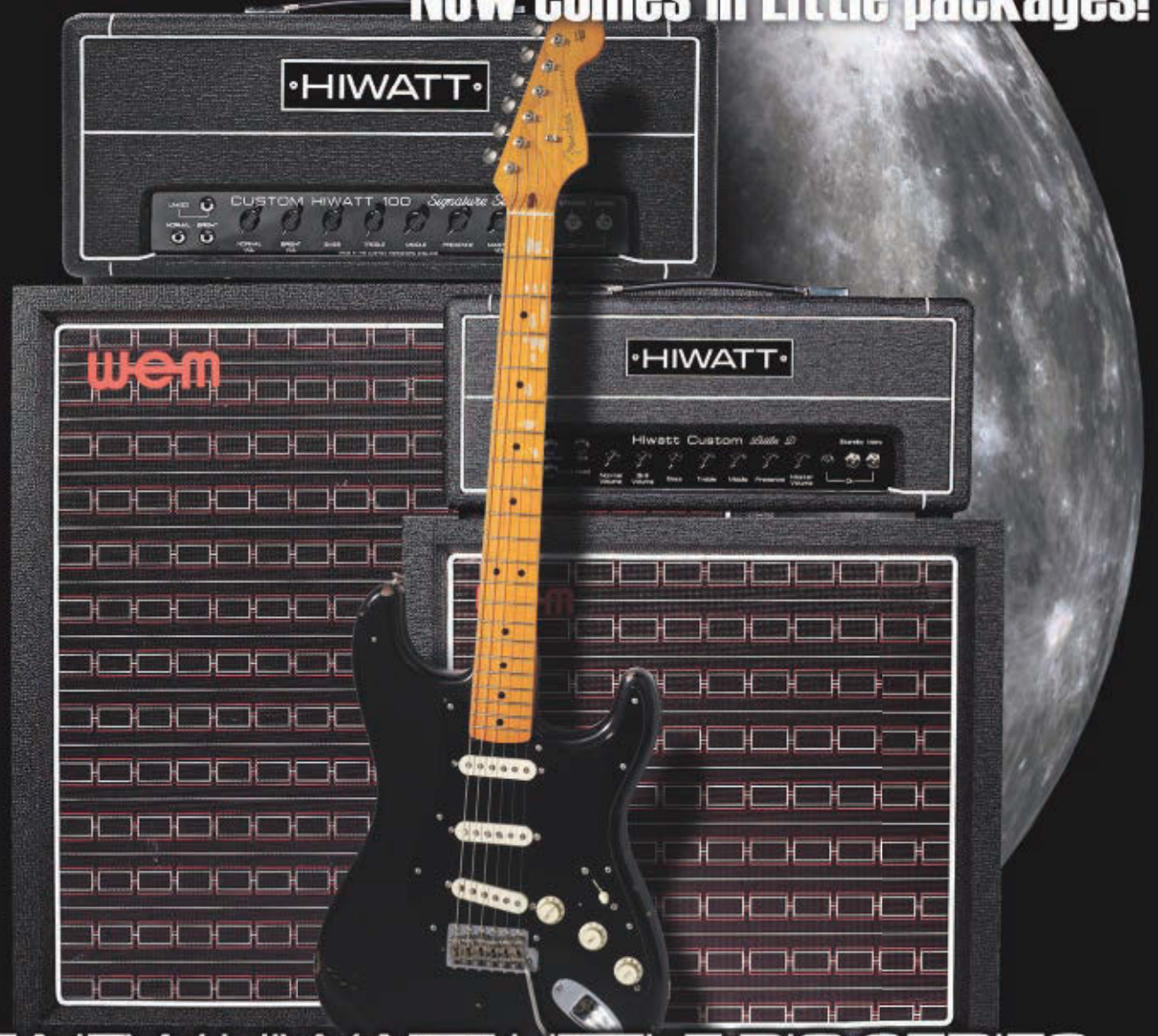

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PREMIER GEAR

EASTWOOD
Airline Map Baritone

By Teja Gerken

Hang around guitars long enough, and you'll encounter an oddball axe that's forever burned in your memory. I'll never forget the first time I came across a map-shaped National Newport. I was working in a guitar shop in the early '90s, and there it was, hanging on the wall, sticking out like a sore thumb among the Fender- and Gibson-inspired electrics.

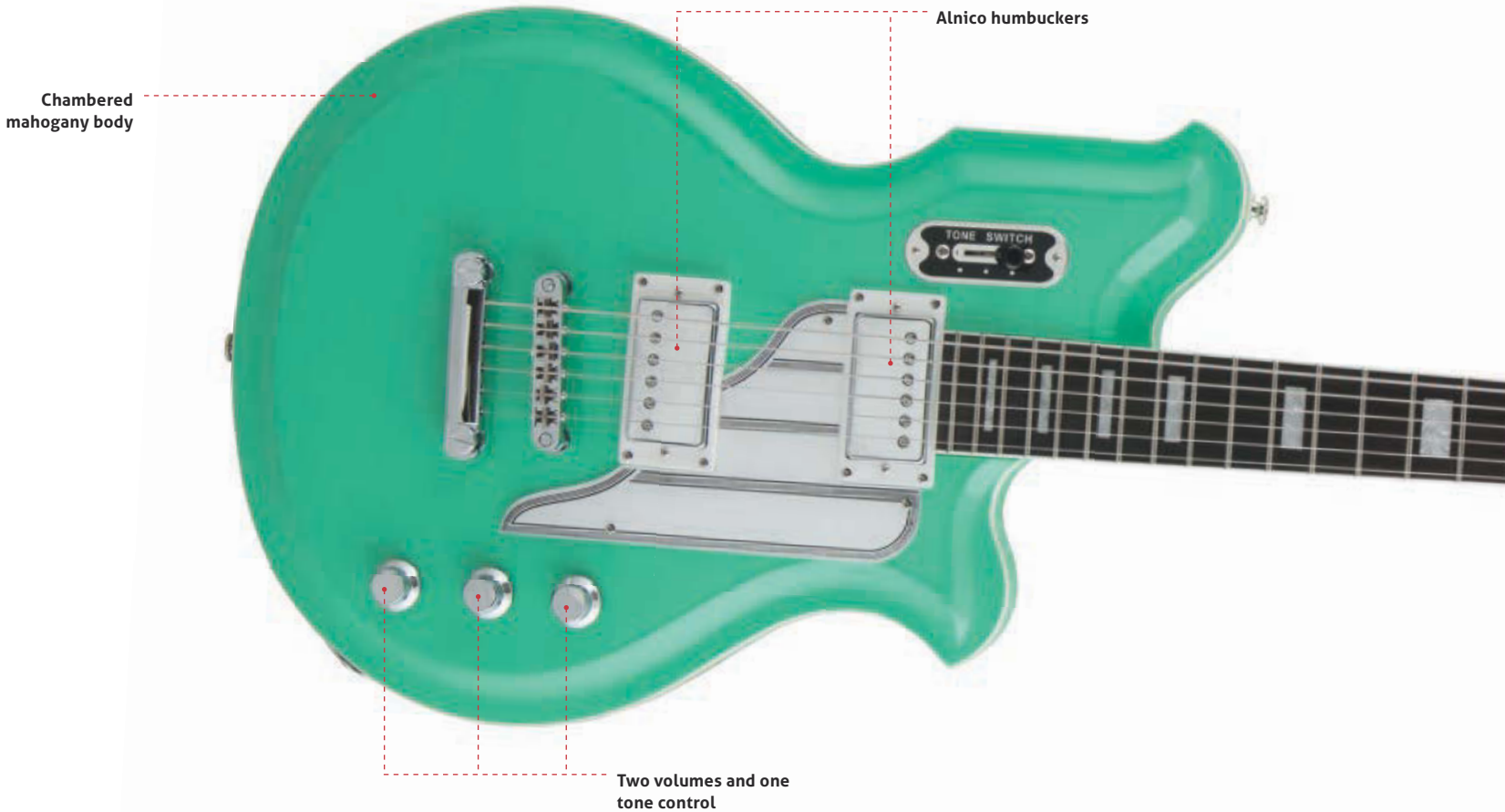
The body vaguely resembled a map of the United States. It was made out of a fiberglass that the company called "Res-O-Glass" and had knobs and switches that seemed to have been taken straight from an Edsel. It was priced under $500, and I should have bought it when I had the chance.

Original map guitars were made by Valco, who sold them through Montgomery Ward. These days they're hard to come by, and if you find one, chances are it will be hard to play or need a lot of work. So it's cool to see Eastwood reissue Valco guitars under the resurrected Airline brand at very reasonable prices. Cooler still is the fact that Eastwood has updated the old Valco designs where they needed it, or created entirely new variations like the Map Baritone reviewed here.

Mean and Green

The Airline's body and hardware tend to engender love-it or hate-it reactions, and I'm firmly in the former camp—especially when the guitar is a bright seafoam green with a vintage-correct pickup switch that looks lifted from a kitchen appliance.

But there's more to the Map Baritone than mere looks. The guitar has a 27" scale, which is relatively short for a baritone, but it came strung with a set of D'Addarios gauged .013 to .062, offering plenty of string tension when tuned B-to-B (a fourth below standard tuning).



Chords have a lush, deep, and overtone-rich quality—especially when employing open strings—that's impossible to duplicate on a standard guitar.

Beyond the fact that Valco never made a baritone guitar in this style, the guitar deviates from vintage in significant ways. Most notably, Eastwood eschewed fiberglass in favor of a chambered mahogany body. Rather than trying to source reproductions of the original Valco single-coils, the company chose a pair of Alnico Hot-10 humbuckers. They reduced the tone and volume control set from six knobs to three. Eastwood also opted for more stable hardware: a Tune-o-matic bridge with a stop tailpiece (a Bigsby version is also available) and chrome Wilkinson tuners that look exactly like Grovers.

The guitar's craftsmanship is very good overall, save for a noticeable gap in the bolt-on neck's pocket and slightly sharp fret ends (which may have been caused by changes in humidity, as the guitar was shipped to me in January).

Takin' a Ride, Slow and Low

Rather than simply bolting a longer neck to a standard Map body, Eastwood moved the bridge back, resulting a more conventional National-style neck/body joint at the 15th fret. (Vintage specimens have a 14th-fret neck joint.) Combined with the modest extension of scale length, this provides a feel not radically different from a standard guitar. The neck has a medium-depth C profile, and the 1 11/16" nut width feels comfortable despite the strings' fatter gauges. While the guitar was set up with low action, it played virtually buzz-free in all positions, and its intonation was spot-on.

The resonance and volume generated by the chambered mahogany body impressed me before I'd plugged in to my Mesa/Boogie DC-5. And when I did plug in, the Airline was hard to put down. Electric baritones tend to be great for creating atmospheric tones and big soundscapes, and the Airline was no exception. Single-note lines are rich with sustain. Chords have a lush, deep, and overtone-rich quality—especially when employing open strings—that's impossible to duplicate on a standard guitar.

The humbuckers and tone controls provide access to a wide palette of sounds. Rolling off the tone while using the neck pickup generates great bass guitar tones. ("Tic-tac" lines doubling a standard bass sound especially good.) The bridge pickup is bright and mud-free, even with saturated tones. Working the two volume controls, I could generate cool in-between tones using shades from both pickups.

What's lower than a baritone guitar? A baritone guitar in an alternate tuning! And the Airline is happy to go there. I got killer results by dropping it into the equivalent of open G tuning (A–D–A–D–F♯–A, which is D tuning in baritone range) and grabbing a ceramic slide for dripping, Daniel Lanois-style bottleneck explorations.

The Verdict

The Airline Map Baritone probably won't be anyone's primary axe, but it's an easily justified purchase given how much it does. I enjoy just *looking* at the thing, but it's great fun to play, and if you haven't explored the baritone range, you'll soon discover how readily it inspires new musical ideas. The build quality has a pro vibe, and I wouldn't hesitate to put the guitar to work on stage or in the studio. Eastwood has done a great thing by reviving this classic, if odd, design in baritone form. PG

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this baritone at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

Eastwood Airline Map Baritone

$779 street
eastwoodguitars.com

Tones	5
Playability	4
Build/Design	4
Value	5

PROS Excellent baritone sound. Relatively easy to play. Killer looks.

CONS Slightly sharp fret-ends could use additional dressing.

VOX
Night Train G2 NT15C1

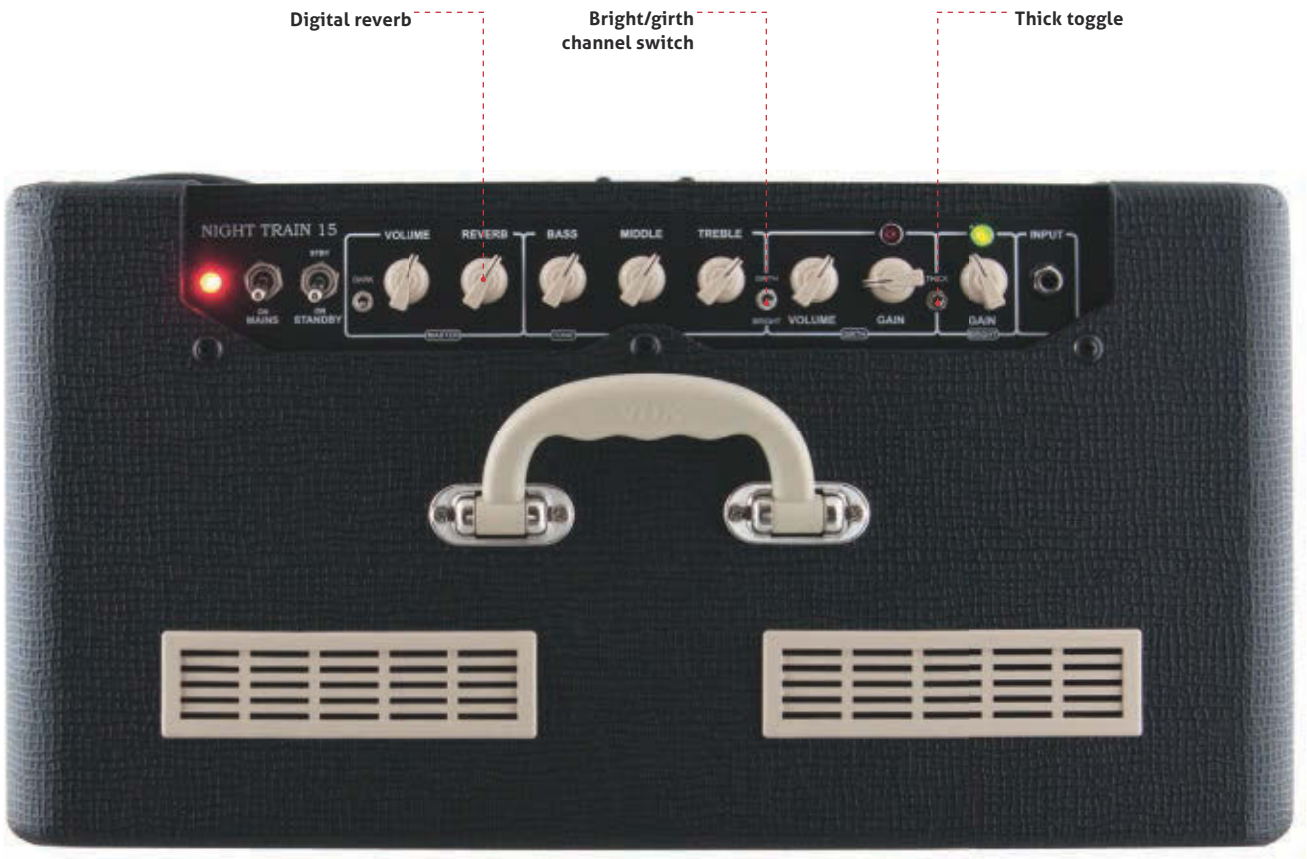
By Jordan Wagner

When Vox released the original Night Train amplifier back in 2009, it won praise from pros and weekend warriors alike. The lunchbox amp revolution was in full swing, and the Night Train's chimey cleans, killer overdrive, and accessible price set it apart. And man, did it look cool—like the retro sci-fi toolbox Flash Gordon would pack before heading off to battle Ming the Merciless. It was so successful it spawned a whole line of amps and cabinets that's still growing.

Vox has revamped the Night Train series with a more subdued, streamlined aesthetic and more versatile channel switching. The new EL84-driven, 15-watt G2 NT15C1 1x12 combo delivers signature Vox clean tones and the original Night Train's great overdrive, along with a serial effect loop and digital reverb in a compact combo format.

Suitcase Rock

For the most part, the 15-watt Night Train G2 combo is as no-frills as its predecessors. An all-tube two-channel preamp driven by three 12AX7s feeds a dual-EL84, class A/B power section and a 25-watt 12" Celestion Greenback speaker, which



sits cozy in a compact, 19 1/2" x 10 1/4" x 16" semi-open cabinet. Save for two top-mounted vents, there's not much ventilation for tube heat, so a small chassis-mounted fan keeps the guts cool.

Channel switching is performed via a selector switch on the amp, or with Vox's optional VFS2A footswitch. The amp's clean channel—dubbed "Bright" on the channel select switch—sounds very AC15-inspired, and its hard to coax a bad tone out of it, given that it has just one control for channel volume. A switch next to this knob engages a "Thick" mode that provides a considerable volume boost. The "Girth" channel provides overdrive tones. Here you can shape the output with 3-band EQ and dedicated gain and channel volume controls. Both channels share a master volume and the amp's digital reverb, along with a "Deep" switch for additional low-end punch. Time-based effects can be patched through the amp's effect loop.

The Night Train's considerable—and surprising—headroom helps keeping the output tight and detailed with an overdrive or distortion pedal out front.

All Aboard!

The Night Train's clean channel effortlessly delivers Vox's famous sweet, clean tones and deep harmonic presence. The tones have fuller low end and stronger presence than on the original Night Train, which enhances jazzy, Chet Atkins-inspired melodies and progressions.

The Night Train's impressive headroom helps keep the output tight and detailed with an overdrive or distortion pedal out front. It also makes for a very dynamic amp. Treble and midrange tones remain crisp, woody, and defined, even under heavy pick attack.

The amp is also responsive to guitar tone and volume changes. Lowering the volume on my Lollar JM-loaded BiLT

Revelator gave the amp a more focused, bluesy character. Engaging the "Thick" mode added midrange focus and punchy volume boost without too much extra distortion, and the brawnier midrange is great for '60s-style rock rhythms.

But generally, the amp's overdriven tones have a modern edge compared to what you'd hear from an AC15 or other vintage-style Vox amp. I copped Brian May-style bark by turning up the channel's mids, dropping the treble, and leaving the "Dark" mode off, but the channel retained a modern color I couldn't completely shake. That limitation aside (and it's really only a limitation if you're a vintage-obsessed Vox fan), the channel gives low-output humbuckers a pleasingly full-bodied low-gain overdrive voice. Factor in the midrangy quality of the Celestion Greenback speaker, and the Night Train and low-output humbuckers become a match made in heaven for classic British blues and hard rock. Meanwhile, there's enough extra gain on tap to cover Van Halen- and Slash-like lead tones and Alice in Chains-style chunk.

The amp's hall-like digital reverb is adequate at low levels, but lacks the character and dynamics of a spring unit. That said, if you prefer clean reverbs that lie *underneath* your tone rather than melding with it, you might enjoy what this effect has to offer.

The Verdict

The Night Train G2 delivers lush cleans, punchy drive, and enough range for just about any rock style other than saturated metal. While some Vox fans will pine for an alnico Celestion Blue, the Greenback is a well-rounded speaker that suits the amplifier's voices. There's room for improvement, especially in regards to the flat-sounding digital reverb. But much of the sonic magic and style that made the original Night Train such a potent little amp remains intact—and improved.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this amp at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

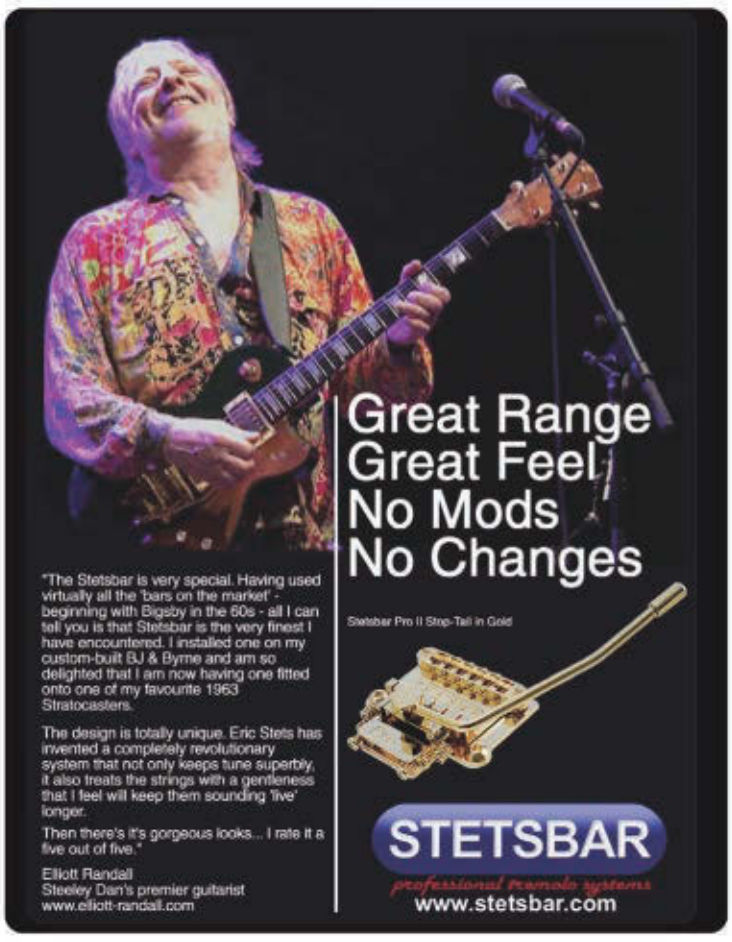
Vox Night Train G2 NT15C1

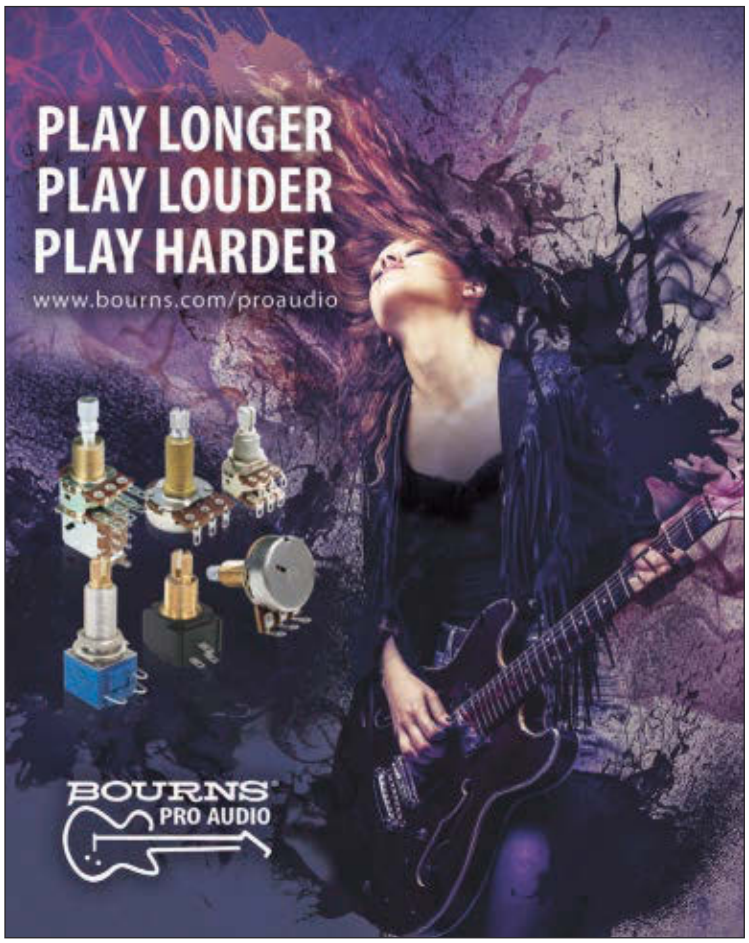
$699 street
voxamps.com

Tones	4.5
Ease of Use	4.5
Build/Design	4.5
Value	4

PROS Thick, detailed overdrive. Pristine cleans. Lots of headroom. Plenty of volume.

CONS Footswitch not included. No adjustment for "Thick" mode boost level. Reverb sounds flat compared to spring units.





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CELESTION

CARVIN PB4

By Steve Cook

Do you remember the first time you thumbed through one of Carvin's catalogs or perused their site? If you're like me, you were probably blown away at the wide range of products this versatile company builds. We recently had the chance to look at the newest member of Carvin's bass family: the PB4, the company's take on a storied classic.

Carvin into History

Opening the included hardshell case, I found a traditional-looking, P-bass-style instrument (hence the "PB" name), but soon found out that this was no mere copy. The jet-black finish of my U.S.-built PB4 looked very nice, and I dug the matching headstock.

Before we get to into the build of the PB4, we must first talk about the, well, *build* of the PB4. Carvin has a downright dizzying array of options for anyone wanting a bass (or guitar) that differs from a stock model. Pretty much everything can be customized on the PB4, though we requested a close-to-stock version for review. Carvin makes it easy to build the bass of your liking with a just a few clicks. If there's anything you don't like about a stock instrument—finish, electronics, body wood, inlays, whatever—chances are there's an option that can make you a happy player.

Our review model has an of alder body (standard), and is outfitted with an optional P/J passive-pickup configuration utilizing two volume controls and one tone control. It should be

noted that Carvin recently switched the standard control configuration on their two-pickup PB basses to master volume and blend dials instead of separate volumes. Separate volumes will now be available as an option.

Although the body shape is familiar, the PB4 felt less chunky and a bit more refined than a standard P. Some may miss that sense of mass and attitude, and some may not.

The 34"-scale bass has 20 medium-jumbo frets and a thin, almost Jazz-like neck constructed of Eastern hard-rock maple and topped with a rosewood fretboard. The 4-bolt neck, finished in tung oil, feels lightning-fast, and the string spacing is comfortable for fingers, picks, and thumbs. All joints are clean and finished, and the frets are perfect. There isn't a gap anywhere on this bass. It was very apparent that even this "stock" model was constructed with care and excellent quality control.

Unplugged, the PB4's sustain is remarkable (no doubt aided by the string-through design). The light, yet balanced 8 1/4-pound instrument is definitely a candidate for a three-set bass.

Passive/Aggressive

I ran the PB4 through a Warwick CCL with the EQ flat. I started out soloing the SPC P-style pickup with the PB4's volume turned all the way up and the tone control about halfway up. The PB4 hit me with a smooth, even tone that leaned toward vintage warmth. While the tone wasn't *quite* as earth-shattering as a vintage P's, the pickup sounded really good at this setting.

I rolled the tone knob all the way up, adding a touch of modern "point" to the sound, yet the result wasn't overbearing. This slightly more aggressive setting is ready for a plectrum or thumb. Runs above the 12th fret remained even and full, and I probably could have played all day using just this pickup.

Next I dialed out the neck pickup and cranked the bridge pickup. With the tone knob all the way down, it's a rather wet-blanket sound, but pushing the pot to the halfway point tightened things up and offered fingerstyle pep. However, the bridge pickup tone was not necessarily my favorite. For me, the single J-style pup is a spice for the soup, not the meat.

The bass opens up considerably when the pickups are used in tandem—so much so that it's hard at times to believe that the PB4's pickups are passive. They have all the characteristics of their 9-volt-sucking cousins, without all that battery cavity baggage. By maxing the three dials, I got to another tonal high with a great sound that balanced low-frequency warmth and high-end snap.

As I continued playing, I found myself switching the bridge pickup on and off. I *liked* having the flexibility of the bridge pickup, but with a small reservation: When combined with the split-coil, the volume control for the bridge pickup seemed almost like an on/off switch rather than a level control. If you want to truly tailor your tone with the bridge pickup, you may have a hard time here. The upside is that the bass sounds really good with the bridge pickup on or off, and at just a slight factory upcharge for the P/J configuration, you might enjoy the added tonal options. Also, with Carvin changing the standard setup to include master volume and pickup blend controls instead of separate volumes, dialing in a blended tone should be much easier.

The Verdict

Carvin's PB4 is a nice take on a classic design. I was impressed by its sustain and the output of the pickups, which made me wonder how an active set would sound. The combination of a thin neck with a light body left me wanting a bit more mass, though that could just be my personal preference. The upside is that smaller-framed players and those with smaller hands are likely to dig this bass a lot.

Carvin is a great place to turn for an alternative to the usual bass suspects, and their new PB4 certainly merits consideration. The street price is budget-friendly, though tacking on custom appointments can really add up. The mail-order scenario might not be for everybody, but Carvin provides a 10-day trial period to determine if the bass you ordered is for you. My guess: You'll probably keep it.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this bass at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

Carvin PB4 Bass

$848 street (as reviewed)
carvin.com

Tones	
Playability	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Well made. Excellent sustain. Nice tones. Many build options.

CONS Design felt a bit too light. Mail-order wait time not for everyone.

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MXR Phase 99

By Charles Saufley

Phasers aren't every player's cup of tea. But a lot of guitarists, this author included, can't imagine living without one. With a single stomp, a phaser can send a jam on a new trajectory by massaging—or torturing—even the simplest, most boneheaded lead or set of chords into something alien and uncommon.

One of the straightest lines to subtly swirling *and* dizzyingly mangled phase tones is the venerable, elegant one-knob MXR Phase 90. It's hard to fathom tinkering with the utilitarian perfection of the Phase 90—a pedal so simple a half-wit bloodhound could conjure psychedelic magic with it. So when MXR's custom shop was tasked with designing a more versatile phase unit, the 90—the Model T of modulation—remained the foundation. But while the new Phase 99 is, at its core, two Phase 90s in a single enclosure, the circuit is enhanced with vintage and modern voices, parallel and series signal routing, and stereo outputs that make the Phase 99 an impressively varied and colorful phaser brimming with surprising tones and utility.

L'Orange Deux

Subtly sparkling in orange metallic, the Phase 99 is unmistakably the offspring of the Phase 90. You don't have to look long, however, to see that this is an ambitious evolution of the form. The guts of the pedal are on an immaculately ordered printed circuit board, though the PCB is populated densely enough to look like an aerial view of Lower Manhattan. All that extra circuitry is the key to the Phase 99's multitudinous shades of phase.

The 99's speed 1 and speed 2 knobs are rate controls—each dedicated to a Phase 90 circuit—while the three pushbuttons above them alter each circuit's voice and control how the two phasers work together. The vintage button alters the intensity of the phase, effectively simulating the differences between an old "script-logo" Phase 90 and the newer, more intense "block-logo" version. The sync button synchronizes the two circuits and routes output exclusively via the speed 1 control. It also functions almost like a panic switch if two disparate phase sounds get unruly in the heat of a performance. The p/s (parallel/series) button shapes the voice of the Phase 99—often drastically—by altering the flow of the phase signals. The speed, vintage, and p/s controls have dedicated LEDs. The two speed LEDs flash to indicate rate of phase, while the vintage and p/s LEDs illuminate when the associated functions are engaged.

Wave Collider

Anyone who's ever toyed with two modulation pedals in an effects line knows the unexpected payoffs of colliding, clashing, and interwoven waves. And one of the real joys of the Phase 99 is how easy it is to explore those textures in a musically rewarding way. The twin-phaser circuit assures that you begin with complementary voices, which makes it easy to weave waves together in harmonious or slightly dissonant but complementary ways. The simplest way to accomplish this is to select the series mode.

In series mode, you hear both phasers together, running in a line, just as if you had two phasers on a pedal board. And it's here that you experience the brotherly harmony of the two Phase 90 voices. There's a clarity that makes it easy to dial in accurate and harmonious wave divisions—say, a fast modulation pulse from the first circuit, and phasing exactly half that speed from the second circuit. These even subdivisions create deep, rich phase tones that create aural illusions of depth—sometimes even a second guitar. They also sound fantastic with fuzz and distortion, and are great for keeping the dynamics and detail of a lead run intact when you want fuzz and phase raging simultaneously.

One of the real bonuses of the Phase 99, though, is how great it sounds when you dial in more dissonant wave rates. It's exceptionally forgiving in these settings: Irregular settings that would turn lesser two-phaser set ups to mud deliver the deep, funky, rubbery texture of a wah or envelope filter—even during fast leads and funk chord comping.

You get even more interesting variations on these sounds when you use the Phase 99 in parallel mode with two amps. One of the most obvious applications is a faux Leslie setup where you dedicate one output to simulating the rotating treble horn and a second to simulating the deeper output of a Leslie's rotating drum. You can fine-tune a setup like this using amp EQ and contrasting amp voicings (in my case, a blackface Tremolux and a Vibroverb reissue) to achieve a pretty convincing Leslie imitation. But the real fun with these stereo setups comes when you use radical amp EQ settings and odd Phase 99 wave rates to create textures that range from stratospherically huge to strange and disorienting—all without sacrificing musical nuance, dynamics, or sensitivity.

The Verdict

If your phase tastes are simple or you use the effect sparingly, the Phase 99 might be a handful. But if your hunger for more complex and versatile phase modulation is insatiable, the 99 is a feast waiting to happen.

A two-output stereo effect always begs the question of how many players will use two-amp setups. But even if that's impractical for most gigging players, the Phase 99 has incredible potential in the studio—where you can tinker with phase rates and amp types and then mix the two signals into many shades of swirl. Wise guys will assert that you can accomplish the same effects with two $80 Phase 90s, but the 99 actually offers way more voicing options—and in a much more compact and convenient package. If phase is an integral part of your sound, it's hard not to be intrigued by the possibilities and value here.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this pedal at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

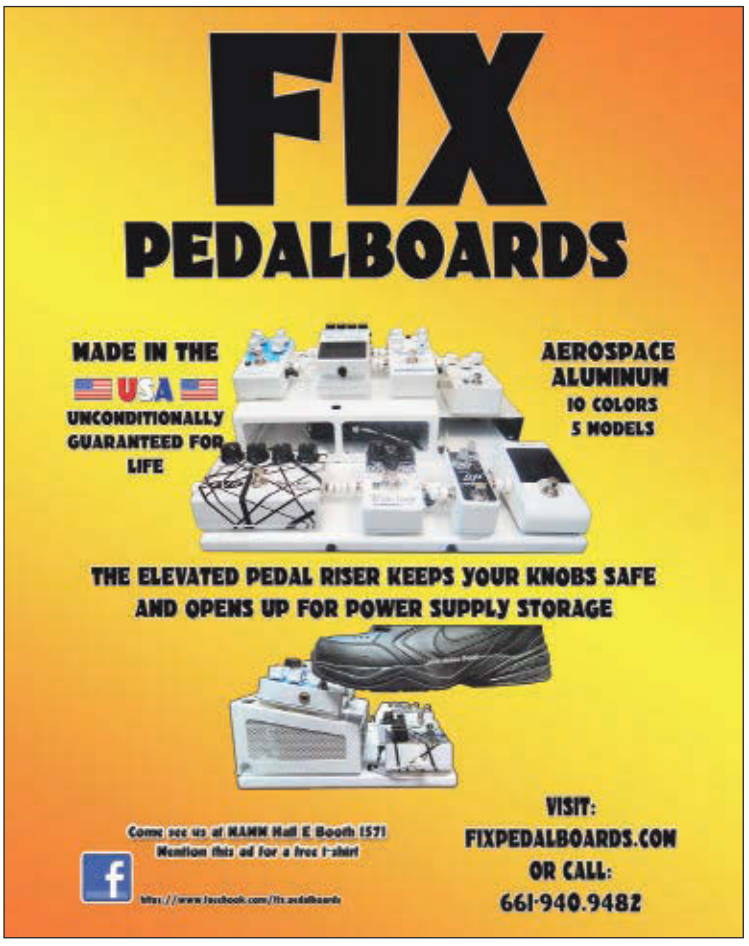
MXR Custom Shop Phase 99

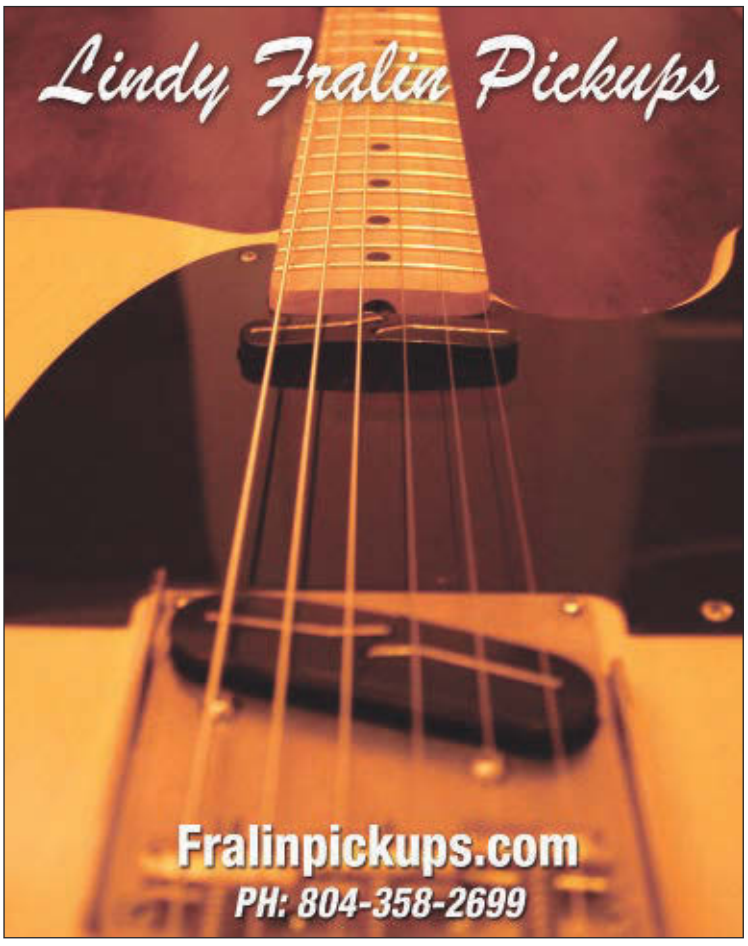
$169 street
jimdunlop.com

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Lots of very useful modulation colors in a compact package.

CONS Slightly cramped control layout.





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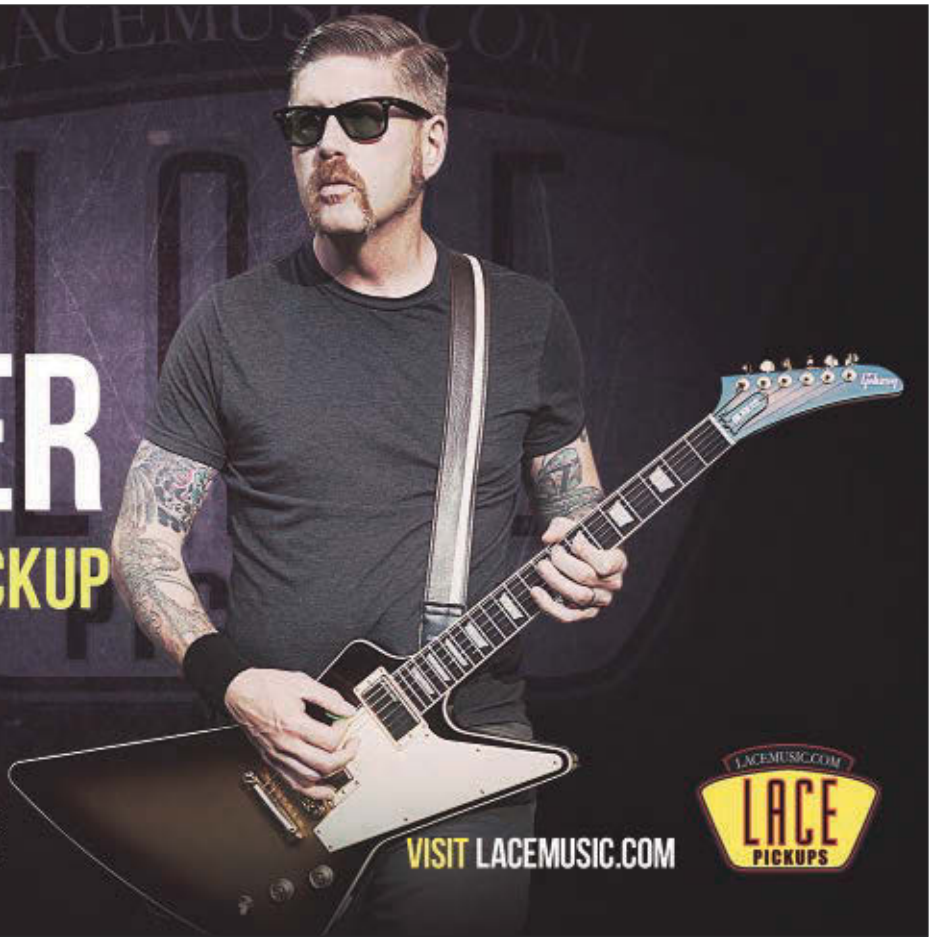
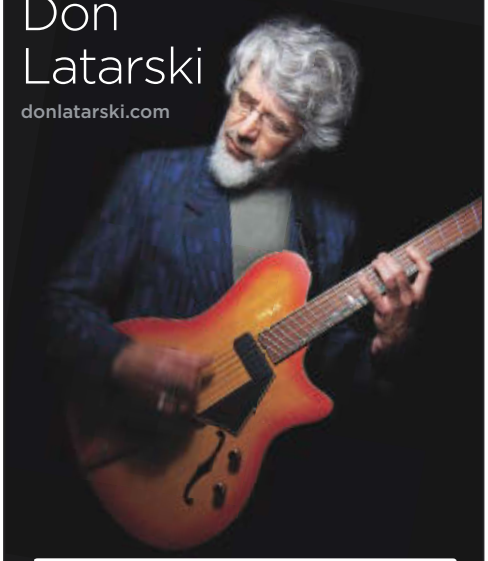


Don Latarski
donlatarski.com



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LOWDEN
32 SE Stage Edition

By Teja Gerken

Northern Ireland's George Lowden is the luthier behind some of the finest flattop steel-strings of the last 40 years. Lowdens have a signature voice, often described as complex, three-dimensional, and more diffuse than a typical American steel-string. Many important players have fallen for the Lowden sound, including Richard Thompson, fingerstylists Pierre Bensusan and Alex de Grassi, and Irish music legend Paul Brady.

Lowden Guitars has changed manufacturing facilities several times over the years, but the current shop, where Lowden and his small team build instruments largely by hand, is turning out the company's best instruments yet. I've been a Lowden fan for many years and own a 1999 O10, so I was thrilled to have a chance to check out one of the company's latest models, the 32 SE Stage Edition.

The F Evolves

As the name suggests, the 32 SE Stage Edition is built for live performance. Lowden's other models are plenty happy onstage, but while many Lowden pickers use their instruments in solo, folk, or fingerstyle contexts, the 32 SE is conceived to work well where things get loud. It has a shallower body (ranging from 3"

at the neck joint to 3 3/4" at the end-block) based on the company's midsized F models. The neck is narrower (about 1 11/16" at the nut), with a slimmer profile than most other Lowdens. It's also equipped with L.R. Baggs' acclaimed Anthem electronics.

The 32 SE features a Sitka spruce top and East Indian rosewood back and sides. This is a common combination, but the wood on the review model made me take a step back. You will not come across a higher-quality spruce top—this one is even-grained, with beautiful medullary rays and an almost holographic sheen. The rosewood is stunning too, with a rich, dark color and cool grain variation. Like all Lowdens, the guitar has a five-piece neck (attached via dovetail joint) consisting of three mahogany sections and two strips of walnut (for increased stiffness and stability). In a nod to Lowden's love for classical guitars, the 32 SE's fretboard and bridge are made from different woods: pitch-black ebony for the fretboard and rosewood for the bridge. The latter features a pinless design and Lowden's two-piece bone saddle. The guitar's body is bound with flamed maple, accented by three layers of purfling on the top. A single-ring abalone rosette adds a splash of color to an otherwise subdued and organic appearance. The clear plastic pickguard is nearly invisible.

The top is X-braced using Lowden's typically narrow, tall, and tapered "dolphin" braces. Inside and out, the construction is astonishingly clean. Given the model's stage-oriented name, I was surprised Lowden didn't install a second strap button in addition to the endpin jack (though adding one is a simple procedure).

Thin Body, Fat Voice

I've played many thin-bodied acoustic-electrics that sacrifice acoustic tone for of hassle-free amplified performance. However, my first timid strum established that this exceptional *acoustic* guitar will make you happy even if you never plug it in. The somewhat OM-like dimensions provide an OM-like character with great dynamics, sustain, and volume. There's a little less bass than you'd get from a deeper body, though you never sense that there isn't enough. The guitar has an easy feel, with low action and fluid playability everywhere along the neck. The relatively narrow nut definitely makes the guitar more appealing for flatpicking than complex fingerstyle work, though some players will find the neck comfortable for both.

Anthemic Tones

I also tested the 32 SE's Anthem electronics through an AER Compact 60 amp, and through an amp/PA combination (using a Headway EDB-1 preamp to split the signal) at a club gig where I played solo fingerstyle, and fingerstyle/flatpicked duets with another guitarist.

The Anthem system combines L.R. Baggs' Element pickup and internal Tru-Mic microphone with a preamp module mounted inside the soundhole's bass side. A built-in crossover dynamically assigns bass frequencies to the pickup and the high-end to the microphone. A blend control lets you mix mic/pickup signals, but even the all-mic setting uses some pickup signal to lend under-saddle push to feedback-prone bass frequencies. There's a volume dial, plus phase-reverse push buttons.

Whether played through an amp or a PA, the Baggs system provides an accurate representation of the guitar's acoustic sound, capturing much of its complexity and dynamic range. For fingerstyle playing, I found that mixes with between 50 and 70 percent under-saddle pickup delivered the right combination of warmth and presence. True Mic-heavy settings, however, provided a much more natural attack when playing pickstyle. I encountered none of the feedback problems I've experienced with other guitars at the same club.

The Verdict

The 32 SE Stage Edition is a fine high-end acoustic-electric for players willing to deviate from more common brands and styles. The thin body is comfortable and feedback resistant. Sure, you could add the same pickup system to other high-end acoustics and get great results. But for out-of-the-box performance, it's hard to beat the 32 SE's rarefied craftsmanship and quality.

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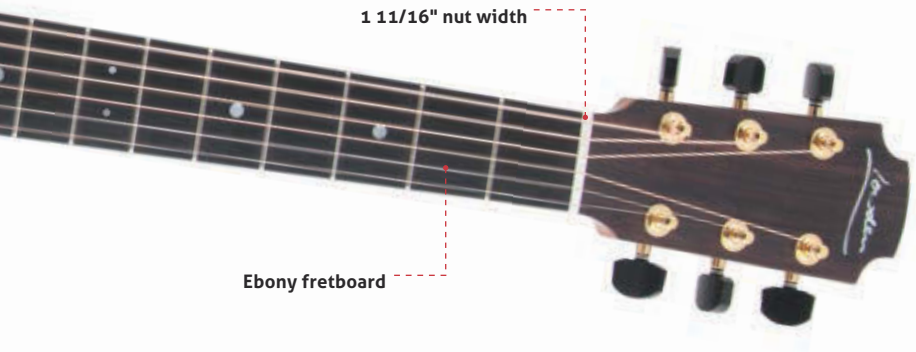

RATINGS

Lowden 32 SE Stage Edition

$5,295 street
georgelowden.com

Tones	
Playability	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Highest-quality materials and craftsmanship. Incredible tonal complexity. Excellent amplified sound.

CONS Fingerstyle players may want a wider neck.

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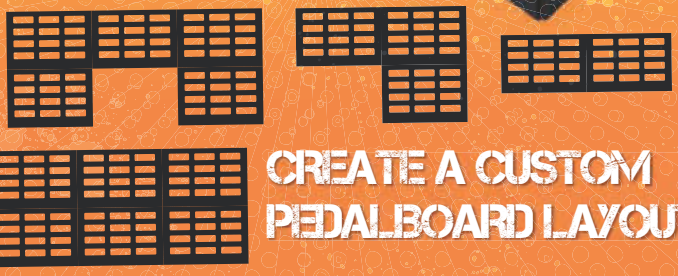

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SYNAPTICGROOVE
Snapperhead

By Jordan Wagner

SynapticGroove launched in August 2013 with a single, simple overdrive/distortion pedal dubbed the Snapperhead. In virtually no time that pedal found fans from Guns N' Roses' Richard Fortus to Sheryl Crow's Peter Stroud. Its streamlined design has a lot to do with its appeal, but it's the Snapperhead's ability to generate rich overdrive and grittier textures without excessively coloring an amp's natural tone that may give this wider appeal and staying power.

Simple Pleasures

The Snapperhead's analog circuit is housed in a Hammond 1590B-sized enclosure adorned with a weathered metallic blue finish. The internal wiring is clean as a whistle, and the team at SynapticGroove took a little extra time to decorate the interior with a few doodles. The Snapperhead will accept either a 9V battery or Boss-style power supply, and its incredibly bright green LED flashes in a tricolor pattern when the battery is on its last legs.

The pedal has just two controls, volume and drive. Synaptic Groove says a tone control omitted to better highlight the voices of the amp and guitar and enhance playing dynamics. The straightforward design works as advertised and pays real sonic dividends.

Depending on where you set the drive, the pedal ranges from wild-eyed and biting to treble-booster-like tones that are perfect for crisp, British-style leads.

Snap, Crackle, Rock

Despite its spare features, the Snapperhead covers a lot of ground. Depending on where you set the drive, the pedal ranges from wild-eyed and biting to treble-booster-like tones that are perfect for crisp, British-style leads. It can have a sharp and trebly edge depending on pickup choice, though I was able to tame its knife-like attack by lowering the tone controls on my Les Paul and Stratocaster.

With a Stratocaster, a Twin Reverb, and the pedal's drive control set close to 9 o'clock, the Snapperhead produces a muscular but defined crunch. The Twin's characteristic sparkling highs and deep, punchy lows become more pronounced without burying the midrange. Raising the gain doesn't adversely affect articulation either. And as fierce as the Twin became at high-gain pedal settings, its scooped midrange and strong top and bottom end—the qualities many players love in a Twin—remained a strong, clear foundation for the extra dirt.

The Snapperhead can also expand the palette of British-voiced amps. My Marshall JCM-800 is naturally brash, and the Snapperhead highlighted those qualities. But the Snapperhead's excellent sensitivity and dynamic range make it easy to transform the roaring overdrive to a smooth purr via the guitar's volume knob.

Setting the Marshall up for medium gain and juicing the front end with the pedal pushed tones into heavy territory, but with little background hiss and negligible loss of detail. Using the Snapperhead this way coaxed fuller midrange and less compressed highs than running direct into the Marshall with its gain control cranked. I was also able to transition from ripping Slayer-like gain to throaty Leslie West growl with guitar volume knob adjustments.

The Snapperhead can tighten flubby low end in modern high gain amps, though you have to be careful. With a Mesa/Boogie Dual Rectifier's orange channel in vintage mode, the Snapperhead added low-end focus while boosting gain, yielding a thicker overdrive with an upper midrange spike. It also brightened the amp's dark voice. In the orange channel's modern mode, however, the pedal's edgy highs made the output more brittle, and I really needed to mind amp's presence control.

The Verdict

SynapticGroove's Snapperhead does a great job boosting your signal while allowing your amp's distinctive characteristics to shine through. The pedal's detailed and transparent character is great for clean and treble boosting. Despite the lack of a tone control might turn off folks for whom simple suggests limitations, but you can do a lot with your guitar's tone controls. With all the dimension and glorious detail the Snapperhead helps deliver, you may never want to turn it off—or put anything else in its way.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this pedal at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

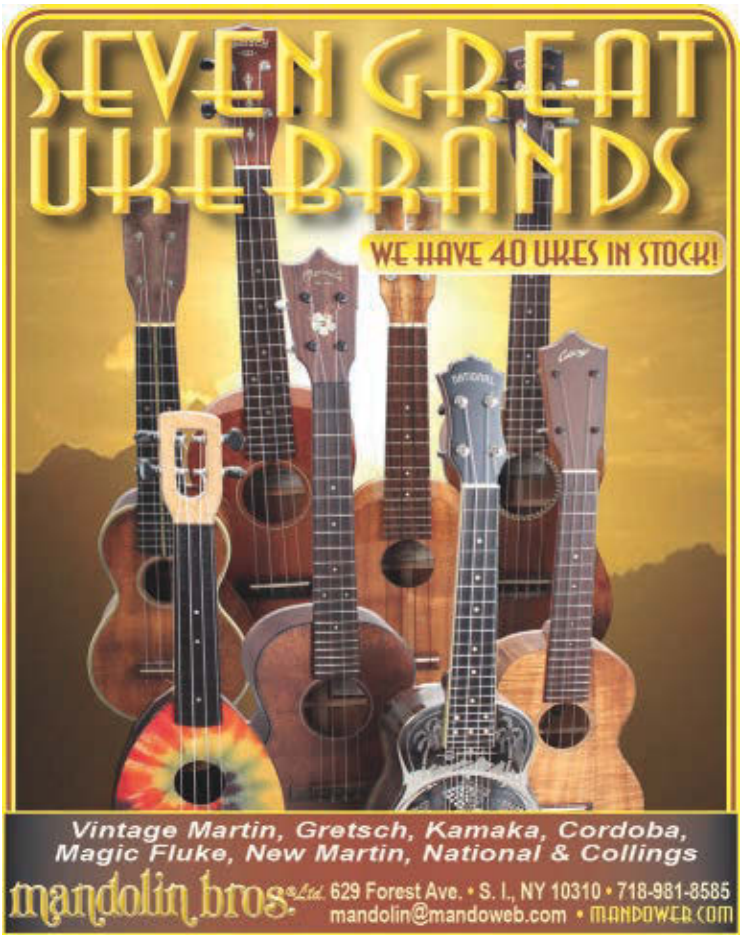
SynapticGroove Snapperhead

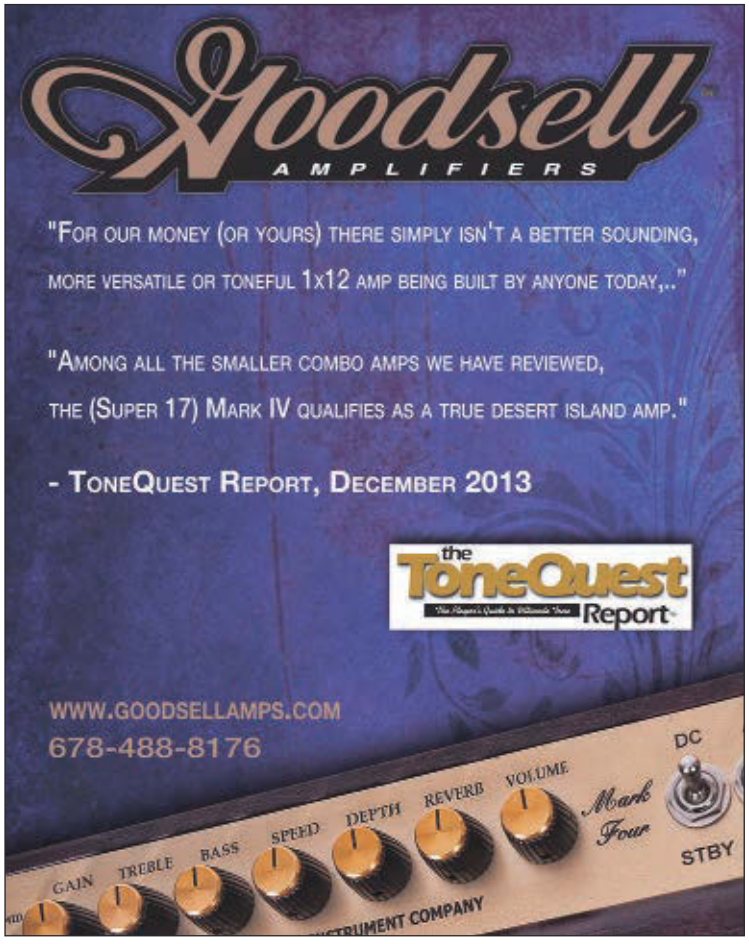
$189 street
synapticgroove.com

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Simple and straightforward to use. Great tone and detail throughout the entire gain range.

CONS Lack of tone control. Voicing leans heavily towards biting British tones only.





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the Straight Truth About Pickups by Jason Lollar

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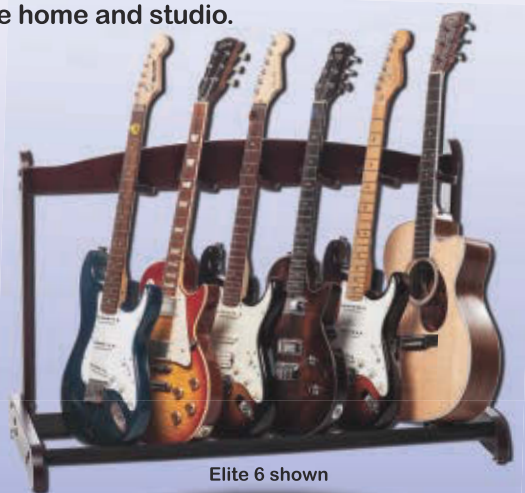

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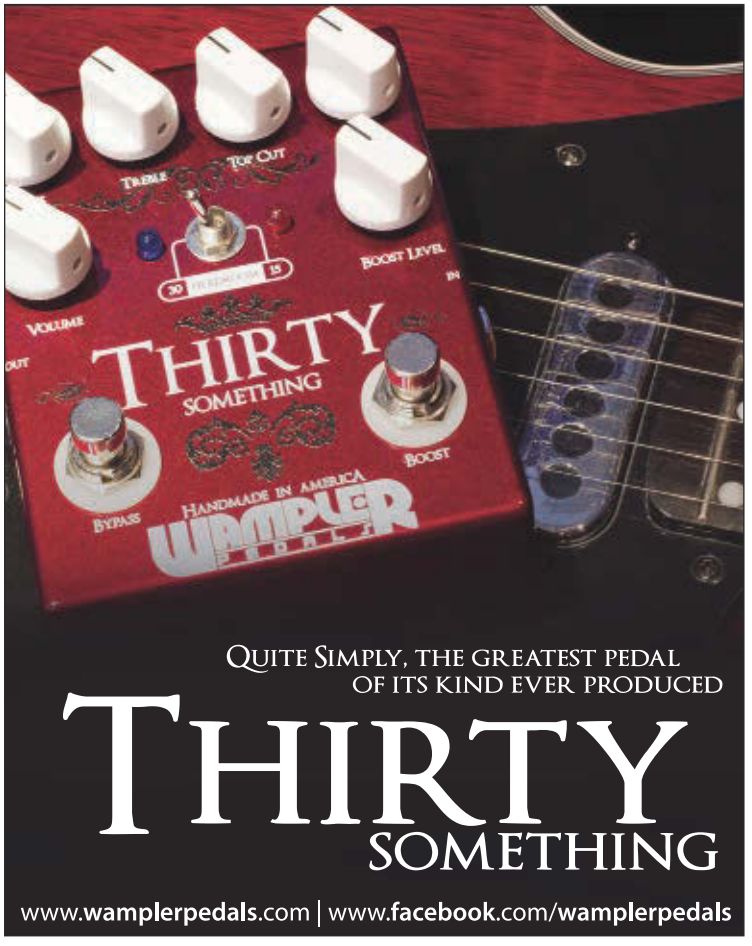
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MARKBASS
Bass Multiamp

By Jordan Wagner

Markbass has already released several impressive compact bass amplifiers. Their latest, the Bass Multiamp, borrows technology from the small Italian company's guitar Multiamp. It's a rack-ready head that combines a feature-laden modeling preamp with a lean, mean 500-watt power section. Markbass offers the amp in both stereo and mono versions. We took the mono model for a ride.

The Right Stuff

The Bass Multiamp is jam-packed with modeled amps, effects, and cabinets, ranging from classics to esoteric pieces. There are 12 amplifier models, each controlled by front-panel gain, low, mid low, mid high, high, and master volume dials. The list includes emulated versions of the company's own Little Mark III and Big Bang, plus classics from Fender, Sunn, Marshall, Ampeg, and others.

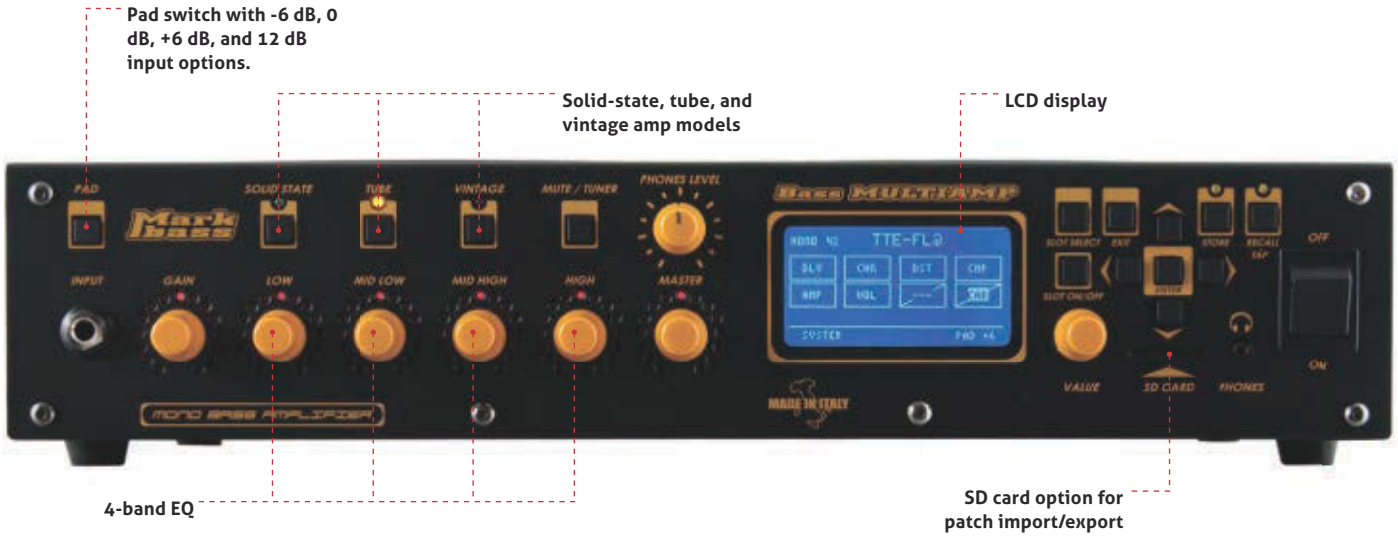
The 15 customizable effects include choruses, flangers, delays, phasers, reverbs, synths, filters, and octavers—all the basics, plus everything the adventurous bassist needs to concoct truly otherworldly sounds. There's also a choice of eight vintage and modern cabinet simulations for use when plugging directly into a PA or mixing board. The physical characteristics of the modeled cabinets can be altered, down to their resonant peaks and cutoff frequencies. (You can disable cabinet modeling when playing through a physical cabinet.) There's also a front-panel 1/8" headphone jack for silent practicing.

The back panel features 1/4" and Neutrik 4 Ω speaker jacks, balanced XLR direct outs with padding, unbalanced 1/4" outs, MIDI jacks for connecting a foot controller (the only way, alas, to change patches remotely), a serial/parallel effect loop, and a USB port for updating the firmware.

Easier Than It Looks

The plethora of knobs and jacks might suggest a steep learning curve, but dialing up a tone is actually quite simple. The LCD screen displays eight slots, each of which can hold a single effect, amplifier, or cabinet model. Simply choose the desired slot, then press the solid-state, tube, or vintage button to select your amp model. To place effects in front of the amp, use the third slot for the amp model and assign the first two slots to effects chosen from a pop-up list.

Most effects come with many editable parameters. And if you have an external effect you can't live without, just use a send/return patch in tandem with the amp's effect loop to insert it at any point in the signal chain. You can save your edits to internal memory or an optional SD card.



The time-based effects have a cleanliness and crispness easily on par with high-end studio plug-ins, and the synth patches track single notes and chords remarkably well.

Live Wire

I auditioned the Bass Multiamp with a Fender Jazz and an Ampeg SVT Classic 8x10 cabinet. I loaded the first four slots with a compressor, chorus, phaser, and a Markbass Big Bang amplifier model, bypassing the effects initially to hear the amp tone on its own.

The Big Bang model's sound and feel are spot-on, down to the thick rubbery lows and boisterous midrange. As I made EQ adjustments on the fly, the emulation responded without latency or high-end digital harshness. The four tube-amp models are even more impressive in their dynamics and low-end depth, and each emulation captures the tonal characteristics of its real-life counterpart. For example, the Blue '70 model (based on the mighty "Blue Line" Ampeg SVT of the early '70s) delivers the raw, raucous punch and all-encompassing low-end warmth that made the originals so coveted. The TTE 500 Randy Jackson signature model emulation provides highly sensitive midrange that relaxes with a lighter fingerstyle touch.

The EQ and volume settings reset themselves each time you switch amp models, sometimes resulting in sudden volume jumps if the previous amp's volume had been set relatively low. (This wouldn't have been much of a concern if the Bass Multiamp wasn't so powerful. It might be rated at 500 watts—as are many solid-state bass heads—but it feels more powerful.)

Editing effects is a breeze. Each effect offers common parameters, such as wet/dry mix for the chorus and threshold/release for the compressor. And in some cases, Markbass goes beyond the expected, such as letting you set chorus intensity independently for the high and low registers.

The time-based effects have a cleanliness and crispness easily on par with high-end studio plug-ins, and the synth patches track single notes and chords remarkably well. But while the two overdrive patches deliver excellent clarity and body all over the fretboard, their high-mids required a bit of tweaking to dial out some of the "honk."

The Verdict

Markbass is serious about developing all-in-one stage/studio solutions for bassists. The Bass Multiamp's asking price might be a bit much for some, but you get an awful lot for your money. The range and character of amp tones is excellent. Coupled with such fantastic effects, cabinet emulations, and ease of use, the versatile Bass Multiamp is downright impressive.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this amp at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

Markbass Bass Multiamp

$1,499 street
markbass.it

Tones	5
Ease of Use	5
Build/Design	4.5
Value	4.5

PROS Beautifully crafted vintage and contemporary amp models. Easy-to-master interface. Plenty of headroom and power.

CONS Footswitchable only via MIDI controller. Overdrive pedal effects sound pinched in the midrange.

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PREMIER GEAR

SOLIDGOLDFX
Zeta Overdrive

By Matthew Holliman

For many players, an overdrive is a pedalboard cornerstone, an effect so essential that it never gets switched off. This is particularly true for guitarists who use super-clean amps. For a dedicated Twin Reverb player, say, a good overdrive can add color and increase their dynamic range. SolidGoldFX's new Zeta, a medium-gain overdrive with a JFET-based preamp, excels on both counts, delivering midrange bite that can enliven the most immaculately clean amplifier.

Orange Glazed and Blazed

Gain, volume, and tone controls—what more do you really need for an overdrive? Setting the Zeta's volume to noon delivers unity gain, leaving plenty of room to jumpstart your output. The tone control generates a bass-heavy voice in its lowest position and a spiky treble one at its highest. The gain control has great range too, imparting light grit right around 7 o'clock and gradually adding dirt and brightness as you move clockwise.

The Creamsicle-colored enclosure's bold, circa-'78 graphics are bright and hard to miss. You won't lose track of this pedal onstage, especially when the blindingly bright orange LED is on. Its pedalboard footprint is modest, but the Zeta's heft suggests it's built to last. You can power it with a 9-volt battery or standard barrel adapter.

Dirty and Detailed

I started with the gain knob all the way down to see close I could get to a straight clean boost. Even here, the Zeta generates more dirt than you'd expect from a clean boost. With a Telecaster Deluxe in front, the Zeta pushed a '68 Bassman into a hot but sweetly responsive zone. The guitar's "Tele-ness" remained intact, but with a little extra attitude. With the gain around 10 o'clock, chunky power chords and sassy single-note tones à la the Stones and the Faces seemed to leap from the Bassman's speakers.

The Zeta produces an almost sizzling sustain that's wonderfully resonant through a closed-back 2x12 cabinet. Note-to-note clarity is excellent and even. Though there's discernable dirt at low-gain settings, the control has a uniform, sensitive taper throughout its range, making it easy to fine-tune the Zeta for a particular rig.

Gain settings around noon are great for barking Tex-Mex blues. Advancing the tone control at this setting clarifies potentially muddy humbuckers. The sound become more compressed at higher-gain settings, but in a way that doesn't stifle dynamics. Tones remain exceptionally natural and amp-like.

The Zeta adds heat without loss of definition or detail. It's great for creating tones that cut through, even at high-gain settings. Pairing the Zeta with a crunchy Orange OR50 produced a nice boost without excessively coloring the amp's output. Applying the Zeta's drive to the Orange's distorted output did little to diminish the pedal's effectiveness. The Zeta's tone control (with additional brightness from the gain control) gave the Orange a razor-sharp edge that tended to improve definition. Maxing the Zeta's gain generated beautiful, singing sustain, though it stops just short of full saturation. Even at its meanest, the Zeta is more Cream than Slayer.

It's a bummer when you add a new effect to your board only to discover it stifles the character of other pedals. But the Zeta worked seamlessly with everything in my chain. I like boosting fuzz pedals with an overdrive to enhance focus and sustain, and the Zeta is a *perfect* pedal for this job. It added top-end definition to a Muff-style fuzz and brightened up a gloomy-sounding '80s RAT, adding extra harmonic richness and body. Delays, wahs, phasers, and choruses all sounded more alive with the Zeta out front.

The Verdict

SolidgoldFX Zeta succeeds in all ways a good OD should. Perhaps the only players who won't find the Zeta intriguing are those who need their boost as close to clean as possible. For guitarists seeking a low- to mid-gain overdrive that doesn't over-color their amp tone, the Zeta may be their new best friend.

PG PREMIERGuitar PREMIER GEAR

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this pedal at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

SolidGoldFX Zeta Overdrive

$165 street
solidgoldfx.com

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Fantastic amp-like gain. Sharp clarity.

CONS Doesn't do straight clean boost.

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FENDER Kingman Pro Custom

By Teja Gerken

Even though Fender began offering flattop acoustics more than 50 years ago, they're probably not the instruments you most immediately associate with the brand. Given the world-changing success of Fender electrics, this is no surprise. But while the company's early efforts didn't take off with serious acoustic players, they were among the era's few truly original flattop designs. Now Fender is revisiting some of these instruments as part of its U.S.-made acoustic line. With its bolt-on neck, the Kingman Pro Custom is among the closest relatives of those originals. But key design changes have transformed the guitar from an oddball also-ran to a unique and truly high-end flattop.

A Brief History Lesson

Eager to cash in on the early-'60s folk trend, Leo Fender wanted his own line of acoustics. Realizing that a flattop was beyond his expertise, he hired German luthier Roger Rossmeisl, who'd worked down the road at Rickenbacker, where he designed many of the company's most famous models. Rossmeisl was charged with creating a line of flattops and hollow-body electrics, including the Coronado. Rossmeisl merged his traditional European instrument-building techniques (he'd received his training at the famed violin building school in Mittenwald, Germany) with Martin-esque body shapes. The big difference was that Rossmeisel used Fender's existing electric guitar necks, most likely for maximum manufacturing efficiency. If that approach sounds questionable to you, you're not alone. The instruments were a relative flop, and from about 1971 through the '90s, Fender downplayed acoustic production.

How things have changed! Purchasing Guild in 1995 gave Fender access to some of the best acoustic guitar know-how in

the business. The company ramped up its acoustic activity after moving Guild and Fender production to Ovation's factory in New Hartford, Connecticut. Owning a state-of-the-art facility fine-tuned for acoustic production allows Fender to create true high-end flattops.

Uptown Vibe

The new Kingman Pro is inspired by the Kingman models Fender produced between 1963 and 1971, but is far from a strict reissue. That's a good thing—the new model far surpasses any vintage Fender acoustic I've played. The Kingman Pro has a dreadnought body built with a solid Sitka spruce top (with forward-shifted, scalloped red spruce X-bracing) and solid mahogany back and sides. The maple neck is similar to what you'd find on a circa-1968 Stratocaster, with a six-on-a-side headstock, Kluson-style tuners, white binding, and medium frets. It's bolted to the body without a heel. Large pearl block inlays ornament the 10"-radius rosewood fingerboard.

Those attributes alone would make the Kingman Pro an unusual acoustic. But Fender goes further with the appointments: The Viking-style rosewood bridge, sparkling gold three-ply pickguard, and beautifully executed sunburst nitro finish lend a luxurious look. And I just *love* the checkerboard marquetry used for the top's purfling and the rosette. Materials and construction are top-shelf, with high-quality woods and the extra-clean craftsmanship you see in the current crop of Guild guitars, which come from the same factory.

One of the biggest departures from Rossmeisel's vintage designs is the Kingman Pro's neck attachment. Vintage examples used long mounting screws and a "tone bar" running the length of the body. The new Kingman Pro uses a pair of Allen-head screws to secure the neck from underneath the fingerboard extension and inside the body. This eliminates the need for the enormous neck-blocks in vintage Fender acoustics, saving weight and allowing the body to resonate more freely. (The guitar has a shield-shaped chrome neck plate, but it's strictly decorative.)

Pickin' and Strummin'

Even though the neck resembles one from a Fender electric, it feels more like that of a typical acoustic. Fender's specs call the profile a "C," but it actually has a slight "V," a nice compromise between contemporary and vintage profiles. With its 1.7" nut width, the neck is a bit wider than most electric necks, and the guitar's 25.625" scale is slightly longer than that of most dreadnoughts. The guitar came set up with light-gauge strings (.012 – .052) and medium-low action.

Strumming first-position chords, I was greeted by a lovely, rich voice with great balance and the complexity of a true high-end flattop. The guitar's tendency toward natural compression limits its acoustic volume somewhat, but provides very even dynamics for fingerpicked and single-note passages.

Plugging In

It would be a shame to not take a flashy guitar like this onto the stage. Fortunately, Fender had the foresight to install a Fishman Matrix Infinity pickup system, consisting of Fishman's top-of-the-line Acoustic Matrix undersaddle pickup, an endpin-mounted preamp, and a small control unit with volume and tone controls in the soundhole. The rig is stealthy and easy to use. Plugging into an AER Compact 60 amp instantly provided a fine, balanced sound. The attack became a bit bright when I hit the guitar hard, but overall, the naturally compressed character reveals a rich amplified voice that would be particularly well suited to accompanying vocals or underpinning a band mix.

The Verdict

It's great to see Fender entering the upper-level acoustic market in a concerted fashion. The Kingman Pro combines cool elements of the company's acoustic past with smart design improvements. Like all the work I've seen from the New Hartford plant, the guitar's craftsmanship is top-notch. With its solid tone and luxurious, show-stopping looks, the Kingman Pro will find many fans, particularly players eager to look beyond the Martin and Gibson standards.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this guitar at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

Fender Kingman Pro Custom

$2,600 street
fender.com

Tones	4.5
Playability	5
Build/Design	5
Value	4.5

PROS Great visual vibe. Excellent craftsmanship. Balanced tones.

CONS Solo players may want a wider dynamic range.

PREMIER GEAR

MXR Micro Amp+

By Charles Saufley

Despite being a huge seller, MXR's Micro Amp booster is an underappreciated little pedal. It's easy to see how this underrated minor classic might go overlooked: With a single knob and stark black-on-white graphics, it's practically the stompbox equivalent of a government-issue Toyota Corolla. But like Toyota's venerable econobox-that-could, the Micro Amp is a reliable, solid, predictable, and dirt-cheap little machine. And it remains the perfect clean boost pedal for certain less-is-more players.

Though some guitarists consider the op-amp-driven Micro Amp indispensible (Jack White for one, rarely uses a pedal board without one), nitpickers find it trebly, noisy, and a little *too* streamlined. For those doubters and skeptics, the MXR Custom Shop's new Micro Amp+ may be a revelation. With +26 dB of boost, it's every bit as potent as the original. It's quiet. And with the addition of two very powerful cut/boost bass and treble controls, it's exponentially more flexible and adaptable to changing backlines and guitars.

Still Stupidly Simple

To its credit, MXR's Custom Shop didn't do anything fancy to dress up or differentiate the Micro Amp+ from its predecessor. The paint is a subtly pearlescent vanilla rather then the original's gloss milk white. The interior is appropriately minimalist too—just a 9-volt battery clip and a printed circuit board that's flipped to keep its components out of harm's way. The real news is the new bass and treble controls, and how they transform an already great-sounding booster.

Tone Scrubbing with Mr. Clean

Transparency is an overused (and generally inaccurate) way to describe most overdrives and boosts. Even the cleanest boost adds shading and a little dirt to your output as it drives your preamp. But if transparent is your aim, the Micro Amp+ gets you very close. At times it seems almost *polite* about preserving an amplifier's voice.

Setting your amp's volume in the lower third of its volume range and dialing all three Micro Amp+ controls to noon (at these settings the cut/boost treble and bass controls are neutral) is like pushing up a fader on a mixing desk: Your guitar and amp sound is unmistakable, but with more body, more dimension, and that trace of edge and compression you get when you push the level just into the red. This is the sound many folks seek in a clean boost. If you keep your amplifier's volume low, it's remarkable how little color and grit are added. These levels are ideal for enlivening thin output from your E and B string (particularly from single-coils) without driving the 3rd and 4th strings into overdrive.

The real beauty of the Micro Amp+, however, lies in how far you can move beyond this cool but simple functionality using the two tone controls. Because the bass and treble knobs are boost/cut, you can profoundly expand the EQ range of your amp, cleaning things up or adding dirt in very specific ways. You can, for example, excite a blackface Deluxe in the 2 kHz range by turning up the Micro Amp's treble and reducing the bass. A bit more

gain can create a Vox-like presence or Faces-style attitude. Conversely, you can dial out a Marshall's spiky high-mid content and still provide extra kick for a lead.

While you can't summon as much distortion from the Micro Amp as from your average overdrive, the Micro Amp+ gain control generates gritty and natural-sounding amp overdrive that can move from deep and rich to toppy and nearly scalding, depending on EQ settings. If want higher gain tones from a mostly

clean amp, you might need a distortion or OD to filthy up the MXR's output. But if you have a Marshall or Orange that already teeters on the edge of distortion, the Micro Amp+ may be all you need. One thing is certain: The MXR won't add a lot of unwanted color to your Marshall's basic overdrive voice.

The Micro Amp is equally effective for shaping the interaction between your amp and varying guitars. The woofy output from the humbucker on a Telecaster Deluxe, for instance, becomes much more defined with a boost from the Micro Amp's treble control. Or you might lower the treble to tame the highs from the same guitar's bright single-coil bridge pickup. This process is easy and intuitive. Few pedals feel like such a seamless extension of your guitar's tone controls.

While the Micro Amp+ is versatile enough to be the only gain pedal for some rigs, it's very much at home on either side of a fuzz. On the back end of a thin fuzz (or an older fuzz that dips below unity gain) it can add muscle and low end. Conversely, it lends top-end definition to a wooly brute like a Sovtek Big Muff—no small asset if you want to generate discernable power chords, or get your lead out over a thousand watts of rumbling bass aggression.

The Verdict

MXR's newly evolved Micro Amp has major studio and backline potential. If you're on the road dealing with different amps from night to night, the Micro Amp + makes it easy to adapt, dialing back the high-mid spike from a Marshall one night and coaxing a Vox-like bite from a Fender the next. It can give humbuckers extra high-mid zing, or tame the sting of a Stratocaster single-coil, all while giving you more room in a band mix. The Micro Amp+ won't generate quite as much distortion as an overdrive, but its wide range can make you a hero in a session or onstage when everything sounds like mud.

CLICK HERE TO HEAR this pedal at premierguitar.com/apr2014

RATINGS

MXR Custom Shop Micro Amp+

$120 street
jimdunlop.com

Tones	
Ease of Use	
Build/Design	
Value	

PROS Intuitive and full of range. Effective cut/boost tone controls. Impressive near-clean boost.

CONS Some players might want a touch more gain.

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MEDIA REVIEWS

Robben Ford

One Day in Nashville

The ingredients for a Robben Ford album have largely remained the same: sophisticated guitar licks, honest songwriting with a bluesy bent, and a robust, meaty tone. However, it's that little extra bit of, well, Robben, which makes it work time and time again. His latest release, *A Day in Nashville*, proves yet again why guitar geeks flock to his shows and hang on his every note. Those notes might not be as plentiful as on his earlier records, but they hold more weight. His solo break on "Midnight Comes Too Soon" is as visceral and rootsy as anything he's played in decades. At this point in his career, Ford could churn out another album full of the uptown blues that his fans will gladly eat up, but instead he chose to challenge himself and experiment with different textures while pushing both his songwriting and singing.

The sonic experimentation is most noticeable when trombonist Barry Green steps in. The big, round tone of the trombone seems to give the sextet a lift, while rhythm guitarist Audley Freed propels the group with his spot-on sense of groove and space. Ford's tone doesn't venture into much uncharted territory, but it covers a few subtle bases. On the funky "Top Down Blues," Ford cops some Cropper-meets-Dupree riffs while the melody captures some of the essence of classic soul jazz.

One of the few downsides of the album is that Freed (who is currently in Sheryl Crow's band) doesn't get a chance to shine and push Ford. The two-guitar format isn't something that Ford is found in too often (with the exception of some albums with Larry Carlton) and with a player like Freed onboard, this may have been a missed opportunity. The whole vibe of the album captures the live feel and urgency of an old-school session since, true to the album's name; it was mostly recorded in one day in Nashville. This album is a prime example of the human element of music—real people, in a room, playing together.

—Jason Shadrick

MUST-HEAR TRACK: "Green Grass, Rainwater"

The War on Drugs

Lost in the Dream

Philadelphia's The War on Drugs almost universally invites references to expansive landscapes, big skies, and the open road. It would be easy to dismiss such a unified collective reaction as lazy journalists cribbing from the same press release. In reality, it's a testament to Adam Granduciel's gift for crafting deeply evocative and vivid images from sound. Indeed, when taking in *Lost in the Dream*'s steady, streamlined rhythmic underpinnings, long-echo guitar lines, minor-key melodies, and Granduciel's yearning loner voice, it's natural to imagine interstate wanderers fleeing heartbreak and seeking salvation.

Granduciel honed this formula on 2011's *Slave Ambient*. But "Red Eyes" might be Granduciel's melancholy masterpiece (the title alone conjures pictures of tearful, desperate late nights far from home). Exultant, full of longing, and bristling with the tension of driving acoustics, drifting baritone sax, and weeping synth strings, it's a heart-rending ride—one of many on an LP that marks a brilliant texturalist emerging as a master songsmith.

—Charles Saufley

MUST-HEAR TRACK: "Red Eyes"

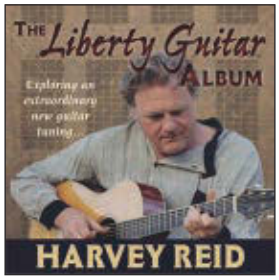
together PANGEA

Badillac

If you're into sizzling chord onslaughts and fuzzed-into-oblivion bass lines blaring through amps on the verge of exploding, thundering toms and crash cymbals that sound like they're going to splinter with every downbeat, and shriek-along choruses, chances are you'll dig *Badillac*—the third album from L.A.-based trio together PANGEA. You can practically see the spittle flying from singer/guitarist William Keegan's sneering lips as his saturated-to-hell Strat or beat-up acoustic veers from lumbering to chugging, lilting, then swaggering. The 12 tracks combine the best of early punk and mid-'90s grunge and garage rock in ways that will be refreshing to anyone who shakes their head when twaddle like Blink-182 is termed "punk." But it's the relentless grip on melody, the breakneck dynamics shifts, and the sheer gumption that hold it all together—not to mention the blistering solos. They're not long or showy, but the wailing, angular lines will slap you upside the head with their bristling attack.

—Shawn Hammond

MUST-HEAR TRACKS: "Alive," "Where the Night Ends"



Harvey Reid

The Liberty Guitar Album

Until you know the backstory, Harvey Reid's new collection of solo guitar instrumentals sounds like the superb discs he's been releasing for 35 years. Featuring moving lines, bluesy riffs, and rich, colorful chords, the tunes are melodic, expertly arranged, and fingerpicked with soul and skill.

But he performed the 14 pieces, which include both traditional music and such modern classics as "All I Have to Do Is Dream" and "Moon Shadow," with only two fretting fingers—his 2nd and 3rd. Reid undertook this exercise in digital restraint to illustrate the power of a new tuning he stumbled across while working with a partial capo.

He calls it Liberty Tuning, and it requires only one subtle change from standard tuning plus a strategically placed partial capo. Reid says you can put a guitar into Liberty Tuning in about five seconds—no restringing required. Young kids, pros looking for fresh voicings, and guitarists who've sustained fretting-hand injuries will all find something powerful here to explore. Yes, that's just two fretting fingers and no overdubs.

—Andy Ellis

MUST-HEAR TRACK: "Fields of Gold"

Matt Schofield

Far As I Can See

Matt Schofield takes forms and themes from his heroes and screws with them. His latest album is a fiercely individual collection of tunes, ranging from odd-time shuffles, to Hendrixian explorations, and even some NOLA funk. Schofield's tone throughout is muscular and clear with just enough gain to give each note a bounce. On "Getaway," a funky jam in 7/8, the rhythm section does a masterful job of making an odd-time groove actually groove.

In "Hindsight," Schofield plays jazz-inspired lines with a burning syncopation that drips with plenty of East Bay grease. The classic Neville Brothers track "Yellow Moon" gets an updated reading while the Texas rocker "Tell Me Some Lies" is straight out of the Vaughan family playbook. For fans of sophisticated blues/rock, Schofield stands shoulder to shoulder with the best.

—Jason Shadrick

MUST-HEAR TRACK: "Red Dragon"

Book Worms

Sometimes nothing beats a hold-it-in-your-hand manual with real pages to turn. Veteran folkie John Hammond, PG editors, and our Reader of the Month discuss great guitar books to learn from.

John Hammond

Guest Picker

What are you listening to? Old blues records like Howlin' Wolf, Blind Blake, Bukka White, and Blind Willie McTell.

What is the best guitar instructional book out there, old or new? I never used books. I learned by watching and performing with players like Son House, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Willie Dixon. Robert Johnson was my initial inspiration and I gradually developed my own style after trying to emulate these idols of mine. I also studied blues records and drove my friends crazy.

Danika Holmes

Reader of the Month

What are you listening to? I've been driving around listening to King's Bullet, a new duo out of Nashville. I'm completely hooked. I've also been listening to female-fronted rock bands like Halestorm and Lovebettie.

What is the best guitar instructional book out there, old or new? I love *The Music Lesson* by Victor Wooten. It's a more holistic approach to music, focusing on not just notes, but groove, emotion, dynamics, rhythm, tone, phrasing, and space. I've read this book over and over again.

John Bohlinger

Nashville Correspondent

What are you listening to? *Live at Eddie's Attic* by The Civil Wars. How can two people sound so big?

What is the best guitar instructional book out there, old or new? I'm a big fan of biographies of musicians. Though not technically an instructional book, *Tunesmith: Inside the Art of Songwriting by Jimmy Webb*, taught me a lot about the mechanics of music and helped with some rudimentary piano. A fun read that gives a lot back if you take the time to apply it.

Joe Gore

Senior Editor

What are you listening to? I'm falling in love again with Nico Kasanda, the Congolese guitarist better known as Docteur Nico (1938-1985). Such groove. Such lyricism. Such cheesy lo-fi delay. *Il est parfait!*

What is the best guitar instructional book out there, old or new? I can't say Scott Tennant's *Pumping Nylon* is the "best." But because it's geared toward classical players, it may be the most overlooked. It's a godsend for any fingerstylist, regardless of style or string type. There's even a tab edition!

Shawn Hammond

Chief Content Officer

What are you listening to? The Pixies and a lot of headbanging stuff—Converge, Bring Me the Horizon, Gorguts, Deafheaven, Kvelertak.

What is the best guitar instructional book out there, old or new? I'm not big into books. But when I was 15 or so and a teacher diagrammed the seven standard scale modes and explained how they fit together, it gave me the tools to try to develop my own songwriting and playing style—though often the best progress came from ignoring or warping those fixed patterns.

Jason Shadrick

Associate Editor

What are you listening to? Although I've been deep into the *Layla & Other Assorted Love Songs* album for years, I've recently taken a deeper look at it thanks to a very timely gift from my wife.

What is the best guitar instructional book out there, old or new? There are two books I would recommend to everyone: For chordal technique, you can't beat the original *George Van Eps Guitar Method,* and for sheer, mind-altering concepts you can't beat Mick Goodrick's *The Advancing Guitarist*.

John Hammond Photo by Shervin Lainez

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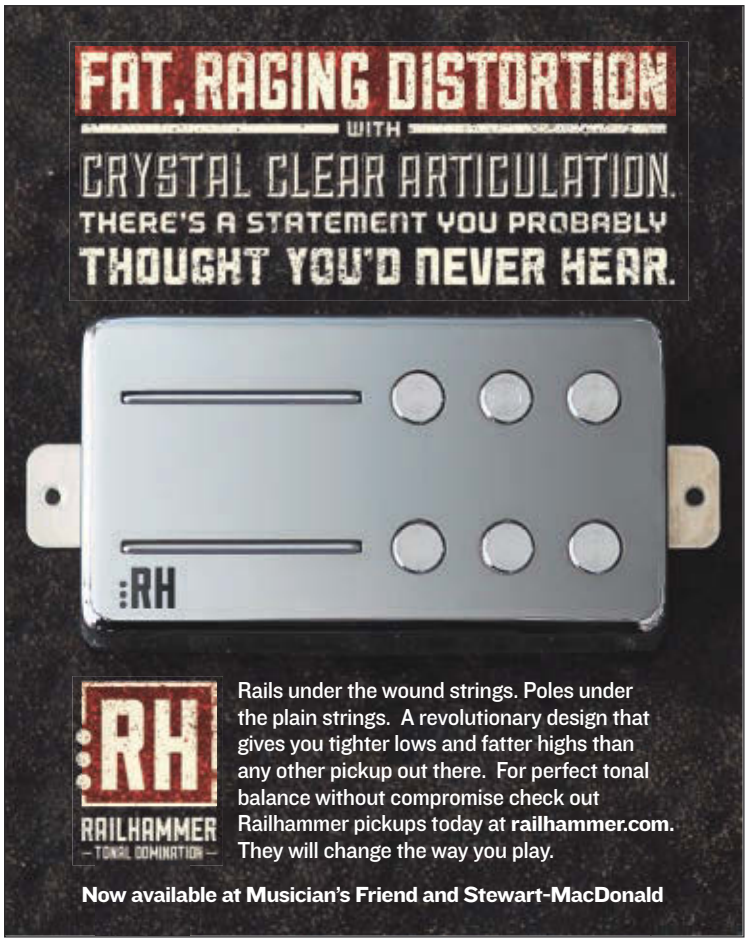

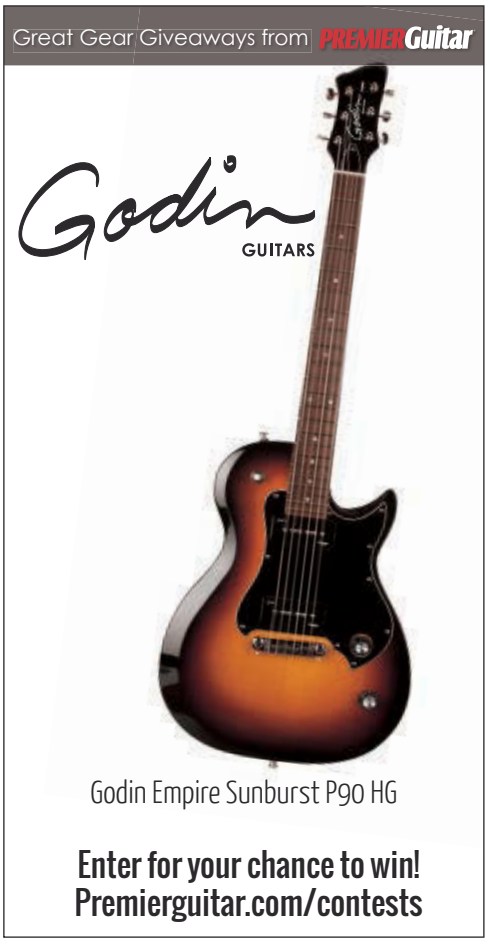

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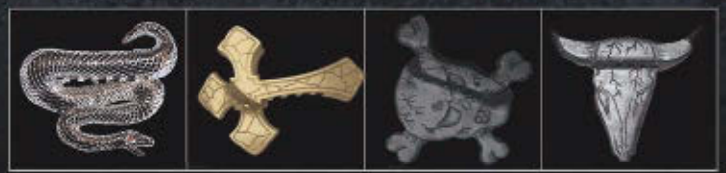

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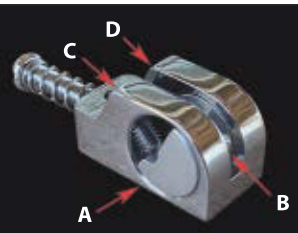

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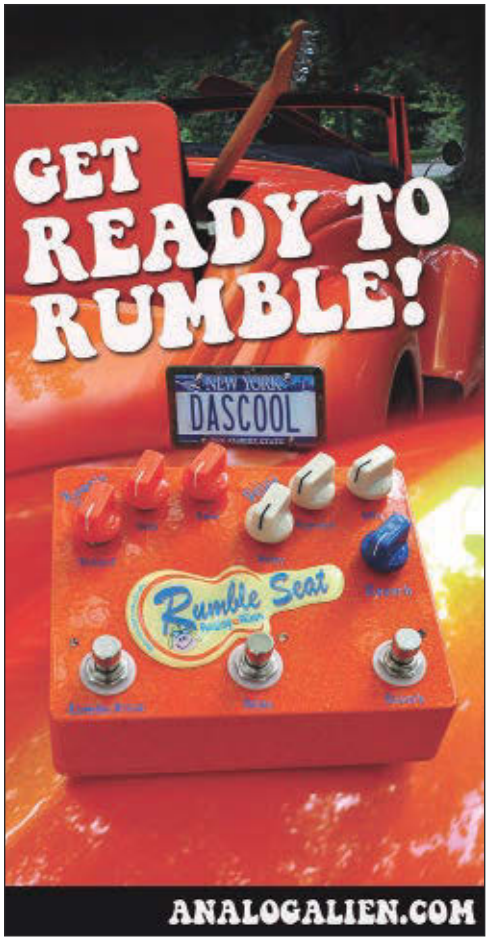
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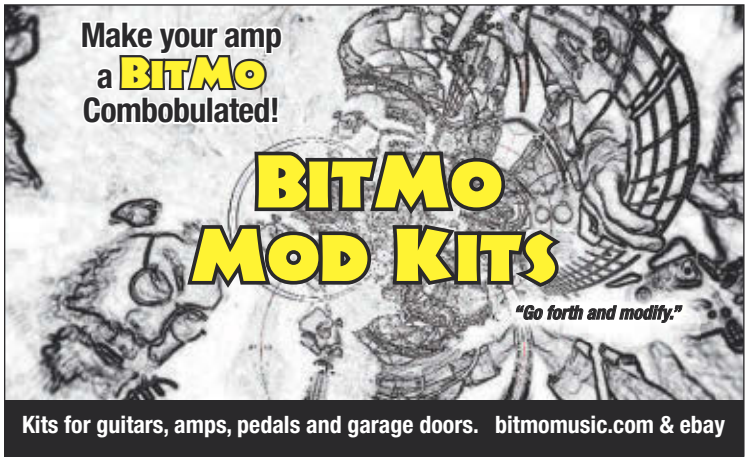
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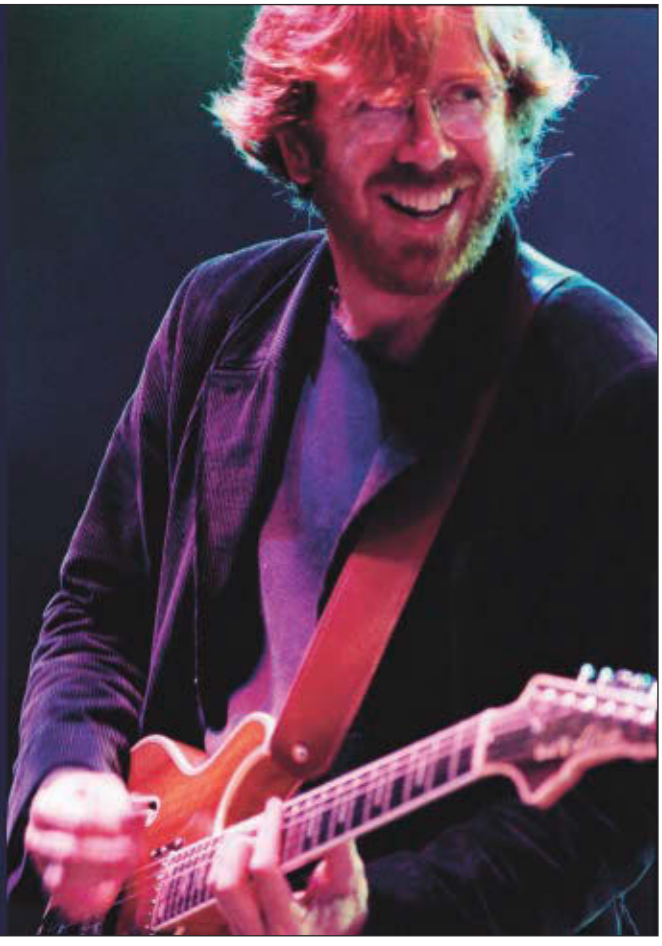

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Next Month in PREMIER Guitar

Photo by Doug Seymour

Baroness, Dillinger Escape Plan, 311, Manchester Orchestra, Red Wing's Luthier Program, and More

Next month, players from six of the planet's most brutal bands—including Baroness (shown above), Dillinger Escape Plan, Deafheaven, and Gorguts—plant their bastard swords in the cold, hard ground and issue their assessments of the current state of metal and hardcore—what rules, what blows, and what gear and albums you gotta check out. Plus, we review the raging new PRS Archon high-gain head and Aristides Instruments' first-ever 7-string, the 070. Tim Mahoney tells us about 311's 11th studio album, *Stereolithic*, and Manchester Orchestra's Andy Hull tells us how he developed his pummeling, Pete Townshend-esque sound. In the world of guitar building, we visit Red Wing, Minnesota, to get a firsthand look at what the kids are learning at one of the Midwest's premier luthier schools.

New Gear

Reviews for the May 2014 edition include the DiPinto Melody Mach, the Electroplex Rocket 42 amplifier, and three new pedals: the Black Cat OD-1, Origin Effects Cali76 Compressor, and the Third Man Bumble Buzz. Bass gear reviews include Warwick's RockBass Star Bass and the Dr. J Sparrow Driver & DI.

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BY JOL DANTZIG

Exotic rosewood, figured maple, and intricate inlays can pile on costs when building an instrument.

By the time you read this, the NAMM show dust will have settled and exhibitors will be home breathing a sigh of relief and licking their wounds, or *maybe* even celebrating a little. Various ideas will have been thrown upon the industry's wall, and they have either stuck or not, at least within the trade. For some, the promise of a fruitful product life cycle is in the air, but that's not to say that any of these products will survive.

So just what *does* it take to come up with a product that returns the investment made in it?

Designing instruments for production is a lot like building your dream rig or home studio. You start out with an A-list of things you'd like. You know—all the cool stuff you're dying to have at your fingertips. But then reality (which looks a lot like a budget) rears its practical head. So much for that Fairchild tube limiter and vintage German microphone you covet! You're trying to get some bang for your buck without maxing out credit cards or bankrupting your family. And the same goes for manufacturers who are under the constraint of budgets while trying to hit price-point sweet spots.

Designing by Numbers

The best products begin their lives as solutions to problems. When a guitar fills the needs of musicians, that's the first step towards a winner. But other times, a product is simply conceived to fill a gap in a company's price range. When I queried a seasoned MI retail veteran, he confirmed that the under $500 price category is where the real action is when it comes to volume selling, which puts a lot of downward pressure on everyone.

Typically, marketers like features but hate costs. Too much bling on a guitar, and the resulting retail price can give sales reps the cold sweats. And when sales reps don't feel confident about a price point, a product can be doomed before it has a chance. It's not that sales people don't want kick-ass products, but I have yet to hear someone in a marketing meeting say, "Hey, let's just build a really great guitar—damn the cost!" What often gets laid out is a set of parameters that are naturally at odds with each other.

Where are the Costs?

The addition or subtraction of any feature is subject to a decision based upon cost versus perceived value to the customer. The basic raw materials for a guitar's neck and body are always a good place to start. Hardwoods like rosewood, ebony, and mahogany are getting scarce and more expensive every day. Leo Fender really got this one right when he specified maple, ash, and alder. Not only are these domestic species easier to obtain, they are significantly less expensive.

A highly figured solid top may be attractive, but is also expensive. Thin veneers are cheaper, but their perceived value is low, so an effective strategy might be to camouflage the thin edges with paint or binding. Binding itself is fairly inexpensive compared to the cost of figured woods, so the trade-off can often be worth it. This works best on flattop instruments, although a pressed, arched top of figured veneers in lieu of a thick, solid top can be a viable money-saver that looks good too. The cost is more of a consideration with *extensive* binding work, however, because of the time it takes to mask and/or scrape in the finishing department. On the other hand, binding can be avoided entirely with a solid top by masking (or even sanding) a line around the stained edge and creating a "faux binding" stripe which both looks great and saves time and cost.

Most of the labor costs involved with producing any guitar are the painting and buffing. Certain woods are easier to finish than others. The closed-grain structure of maple allows it to be painted easily and without the need for a pore-filler step. Speaking of paint, ultraviolet curing of urethane or polyester coatings can shave *days* off production time. And time is money.

Fretboard inlays have high perceived value, and can be a secret weapon to raise a product's profile. CNC (computer numerical control) routing of both inlays and the associated fretboard pockets has streamlined this operation to the point that it's a viable addition to almost any guitar. Yet another avenue is using imitation shell products that look good enough to add flair without breaking the bank. Can *you* tell the difference?

Hardware is always a consideration, and typically every component is scrutinized for cost versus performance. The price of electronic and hard parts from China has come down significantly, and the quality has only suffered slightly. The greatest difference seems to be in longevity, and with so many players upgrading hardware with aftermarket products, the OEMs are off the hook.

The Real Money

Of course, if we're talking about U.S.-based manufacturing, the *big* money is in the labor. Labor costs dwarf those of parts and materials, which is why so much production has moved to developing countries where wages and benefits are low. But regardless of the country of manufacture, builders *always* watch the pennies. And the larger the production, the more it adds up. Either way, it's quite the balancing act to bring a successful product to market.

JOL DANTZIG *is a noted designer, builder, and player who co-founded Hamer Guitars, one of the first boutique guitar brands, in 1973. Today, as the director of Dantzig Guitar Design, he continues to help define the art of custom guitar. To learn more, visit guitardesigner.com.*

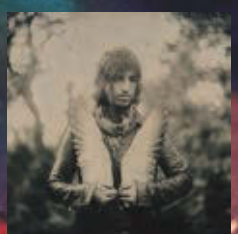
Godin
GUITARS

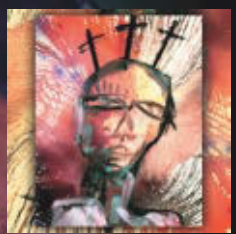
rethink your tone

Photo : Michelle Shalloo Gadeikis

Joseph Arthur

"If you want to paint with
true tone... Godin."





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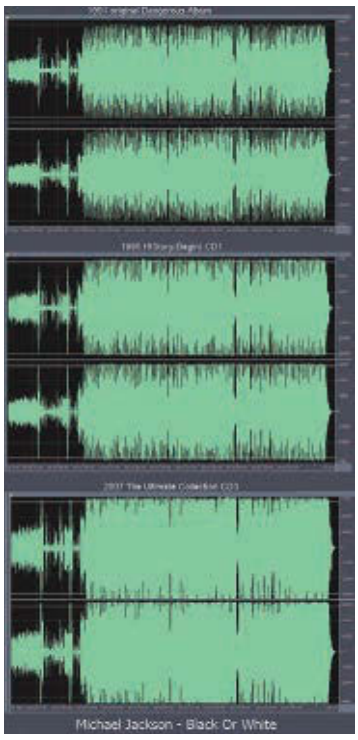
The Power of Dynamics

BY JOHN BOHLINGER

The other day my Grammy-winning engineer friend, Masa Fukudome, played me a CD he'd just purchased for recreational purposes. The first song began with an acoustic guitar and a whispering falsetto vocal. Pounding Bonham-style drums led into the second verse as the band joined in with rectified power chords and thundering bass. By the chorus, it was a full-frontal assault: Stacked, angry guitars chugged eighth-notes in tandem with the bass and double kick while the singer yelled like a scary devil/televangelist. Strangely, the intro, verse, chorus, solo, and whispery vocal/acoustic outro were all roughly the same volume. The band played great, the production was inventive, and the songs were good, but the whole experience was about 80-percent less cool because all the life had been compressed out of the music in the final mix and mastering.

As mesmerizing as music is, it comprises only a few elements. Depending on who's providing the definition, this short list includes rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, form, and dynamics. That's not much to work with, but some musicians restrict themselves to even less. My guess is the death of dynamics came about from a fear of not being heard. Record companies, producers, and musicians all want their tracks to sound big on radio and TV, so they juice the volume and then compress the sound so even the quiet bits will cut. Alas, that totally jacks up the end product.



LEFT: When a hit song gets remastered for a compilation or box set, the engineer often increases compression to make the track seem louder. Dynamics disappear in this "loudness war," as illustrated by these waveforms from the original 1991 and subsequent 1997 and 2007 remastered versions of Michael Jackson's "Black or White."

In orchestral music, dynamics are a hugely important part of the experience. Scores are peppered with *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, and *ff*—dynamic markings that indicate *pianissimo* (very soft) to *fortissimo* (very loud) and all points between. Extreme dynamics also define the sound of many post-rock guitar bands.

But today's pop music is mastered so all the levels are squashed to hover right below the red line of digital distortion. This gives us an emotionless *ff* all the time. Import a modern pop, rock, or country song into Pro Tools and look at the waveform. Instead of a sexy, curving thing that rises and falls with the volume, you'll see a nearly continuous fat, fuzzy rectangle. Now for contrast, examine the Beatles' "Oh! Darling" and you'll see the dB meter rise and fall as Paul McCartney works the vocal. Can you imagine how lame that awesome song would be with a dynamic-free performance?

When you get a chance, attend a concert by a world-class orchestra in an acoustically tuned venue. You'll be on the edge of your seat listening intently to a faint melody played by a solo flute over a few subtle strings and then—*boom*—80 other players come in loud and proud. The hairs will stand up on your head and then before you know it, the damn flute is lulling you to sleep again until the next *ff* outburst scares the crap out of you.

That's the power of dynamics. Regrettably, many modern drummers don't get it. Say "dynamics" to some and they'll respond, "Dynamics? I'm already playing as loud as I can." This puts us guitarists in the no-win position of trying to blow over them. Bass players can be equally difficult: Many set their volume so they can hear it far above everything else onstage, not realizing that because of the omnidirectional nature of low frequencies, they're burying the music for everyone else.

The other night while I was playing at Robert's Western World in Nashville, the steel player said, "Could you come down more when I'm soloing so I can use some dynamics?" I felt like such a turd! I'd been trying to hear myself over the drums but while doing so, I pretty much ruined the steeler's chance to communicate through his instrument. I also realized that I started all of my solos by stomping a get-loud pedal and cranking my guit's volume. It was all blow, blow, blow, then stop when somebody sings. Chagrinned, I spent the rest of the night trying to work my volume like a good Southern preacher.

The next time you're playing with a band, try this: When it's time for your solo, turn around to the drums, crouch down, and start playing quietly. Hopefully the rest of the band will read what you're doing and come down with you. You'll notice that even the crowd will get quiet and start listening more closely. Then begin sneaking up your volume *and* posture until you rip the roof off the dump. Compared to the quiet stuff, your "loud" will seem so much louder. Check out Buddy Guy, who's not afraid to play so quietly you can hear his Strat acoustically onstage. When he has the whole room leaning in, desperately trying to hear what he's playing, he'll crank up the heat and melt faces in the front row. Be like Buddy—don't drown out the crowd, just make them stop talking because they want to listen.

JOHN BOHLINGER *is a Nashville musician who has led the band on NBC's* Nashville Star *and served as musical director of the* CMT Music Awards *for five years. In addition to his "Last Call" column, John recently joined* PG *as our full-time gear demo/Rig Rundown video dude.*

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-Paul Gilbert

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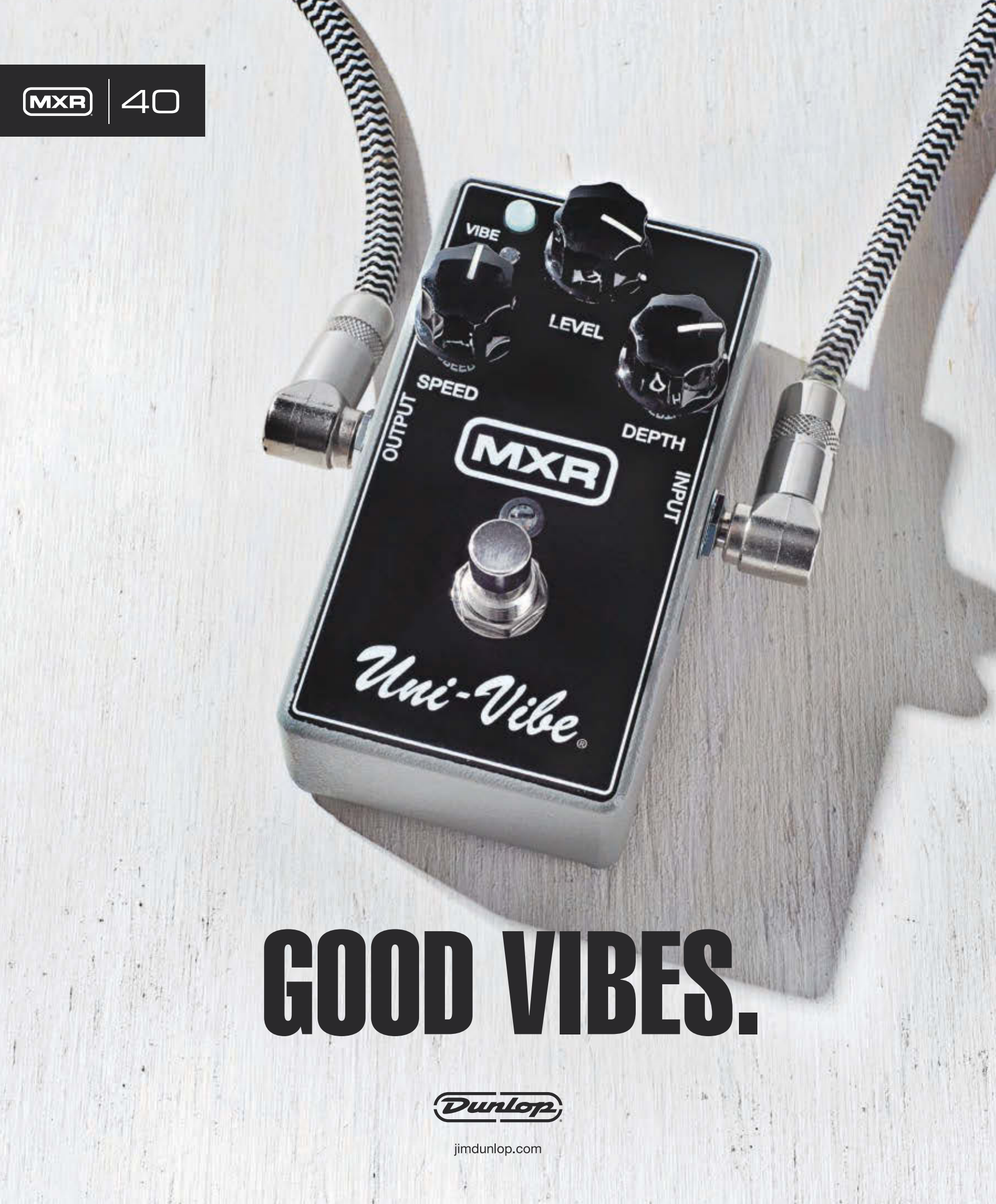
Photo by James Chiang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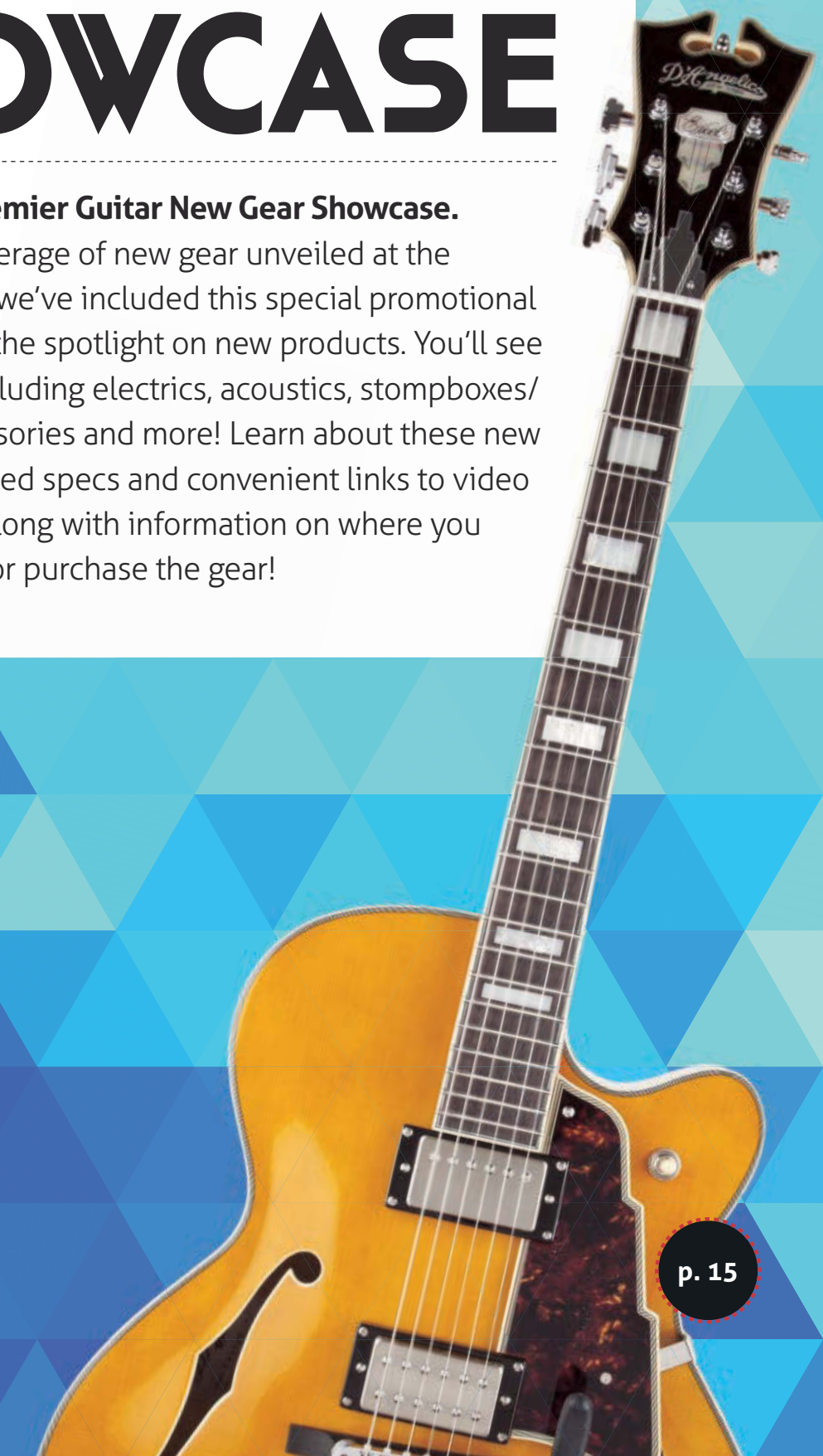
PREMIER Guitar

NEW GEAR SHOWCASE

Welcome to the Premier Guitar New Gear Showcase. To augment our coverage of new gear unveiled at the 2014 NAMM Show, we've included this special promotional section that shines the spotlight on new products. You'll see a variety of gear, including electrics, acoustics, stompboxes/effects, amps, accessories and more! Learn about these new products with detailed specs and convenient links to video and audio demos, along with information on where you can go to play and/or purchase the gear!



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TAYLOR
814ce

As a Premier Gear winner, Taylor's popular 814ce offers players the ultimate all-purpose guitar. Its balance, warmth and articulation are great for fingerstyle, it has enough punch as a strummer to front a band, and the top-end power will fuel lead runs without getting shrill. It's a great choice for a gigging player looking for one guitar that can cover it all. The revoicing of the 800 Series has brought greater warmth, a more mature midrange, and a looser, more luxurious low end to the 814ce, thanks in part to the customized bracing and a new, custom-calibrated Elixir HD Light string-gauge set. Premium appointments include maple binding and back strip, rosewood top edge trim, a rosewood pickguard, Taylor's new Element fretboard inlay in mother-of-pearl, a marbled fretboard, and new Expression System 2 acoustic electronics.

Street price: $3,199.00
taylorguitars.com

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3 MONKEYS AMPS

The Orangutan Jr.

An all new amp model, with its roots in the circuit of its big brother The Orangutan.

This little guy has two cathode biased 6V6 power tubes and three 12AX7 preamp tubes. Controls are VOLUME, TREBLE, BASS, REVERB, and MASTER. It also has a foot switchable BOOST (which bypasses the bass control, similar to the LIFT on The Orangutan). At around 15W, this is the perfect amp for the small stage, studio, or bedroom.

Currently in use on stage and in the studio with our artists Butch Walker, Justin Sharbono (Soul Asylum), and Jason Morrow.

Street price: **Starting at $1,799.00**
3monkeysamps.com

3 MONKEYS AMPS | THE NEW SHAPE OF TONE

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SEYMOUR DUNCAN

Vapor Trail

The Vapor Trail is a true analog delay pedal using the famed Bucket Brigade Devices (BBDs), giving the pedal an authentic, vintage sound with warmth, fullness and depth, but with an immense clarity that keeps it from getting lost in the mix. It features full modulation controls, 600 ms of delay, a TRS insert jack to add effects to the wet signal, and a visual feedback delay LED. Each unit is assembled in Santa Barbara, California.

Street price: $149.95
seymourduncan.com

Seymour Duncan. HEAR SOUND CLIPS PLAY VIDEOS BUY IT NOW FIND US ON FACEBOOK

SEYMOUR DUNCAN

Dirty Deed

The Dirty Deed Distortion Pedal is an analog, true-bypass pedal that was created to capture the character and responsiveness of a classic overdriven tube amplifier with elements of distortion, fuzz, and overdrive combined into a single wide-range pedal. With a turn of the gain knob you can go from the sparkling overdrive of your favorite classic rock songs to a rich, powerful hard rock distortion with amp-like saturation. Assembled in Santa Barbara, California.

Street price: $119.95
seymourduncan.com

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MONO
Vertigo Semi-Hollow

MONO expands its award winning Vertigo™ hybrid case line with the Vertigo Semi-Hollow. The Vertigo is the world's first Top-Loading™ guitar case—allowing upright access saves time and space during setup and teardown. The Vertigo also features The Boot™, a molded rubber sole to prevent damage on vertical drops. Inside, an automatic Headlock™ system protects the guitar's headstock and neck during big falls. Vertigo cases are available for electric, semi-hollow, and bass guitars, and are compatible with the MONO Guitar Tick™, a detachable tool bag for storage of cables, small pedalboards, and other necessities.

Street price: $255.00
monocreators.com

mono®

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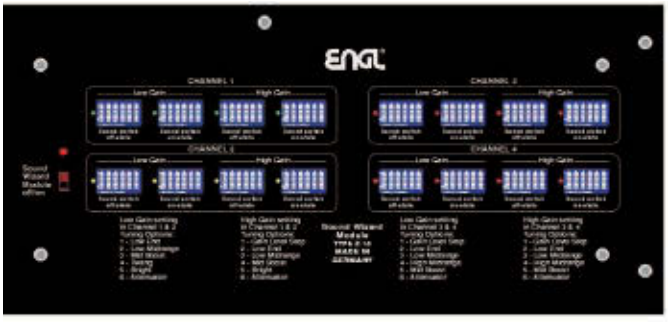
ENGL AMPLIFICATION

Invader II E642/2

How do you surpass a successful amp like the Invader 100? Listen to your player's demands and give them total control of their sounds. Powered by four EL34s, the ENGL INVADER II features an improved channel design including two Clean and two Overdrive channels, all switchable between a HI or LOW Gain mode plus a SOUND switch that changes the character per channel. That's a total tonal variety of 16 basic sounds!

Adding in the optional new SOUND WIZARD MODULE E-16 is a tone hunter's dream come true. When inserted in the back of the amp, the modules offers 12 Sound Options for all 16 basic sounds to customize and fine tune your desired tones. Invade your amp sound—customize your tone!



Street price: $3,199.99 (amp), $399.99 (Sound Wizard)
engl-amps.com

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ENGL AMPLIFICATION

Power Amp E810/20

The E810/20 is a lightweight, 1U stereo tube power amp delivering 2x20 watts. Each stereo channel, Left and Right, includes separate Volume (A/B) and Presence and Depth (Sound Set A/B) controls enabling access to different tonal settings. An Input Gain Level switch allows for boosting input gain. Volume A/B switching and Sound Set A/B can be remote controlled via an optional Z-4 footswitch. Powered by four EL84 power tubes with three ECC83 preamp tube and phase splitter tubes, the E810/20 also includes 8 ohms and 16 ohms outputs for each channel.

Street price: $1,349.99
engl-amps.com

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ENGL AMPLIFICATION

ENGL Bass Rackhead E1060

The Rackhead 1060 is a versatile bass amp for use on tour or in studio. It includes 2 Channels (one tube, one solid-state) each with a class D power amp, and all of the tone shaping, controls, and functions you could possible hope for! Also available are 4x10 and 1x15 pro speaker cabs. Visit engl-amps.com for complete details.

Street price: $2,199.99
engl-amps.com

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ELIXIR STRINGS

ELIXIR HD Light Strings

NEW ELIXIR HD Light Strings were developed with Taylor Guitars to bring bolder highs and fuller lows to the Grand Concert and Grand Auditorium by creating a unique tension profile across the soundboard. The increased tension of the treble strings improves their articulation. The interaction of the tension profile with the soundboard also adds harmonic content to the bass strings. This is accomplished by blending the medium gauge plain steel strings with light gauge wound strings, bridged by a custom .025 third string.

Available in Phosphor Bronze and 80/20 Bronze with NANOWEB® Coating.
Bolder, stronger high end.
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Balanced voice across all strings.
Ideal for any narrow-bodied guitar.
Comfortable, balanced hand feel.
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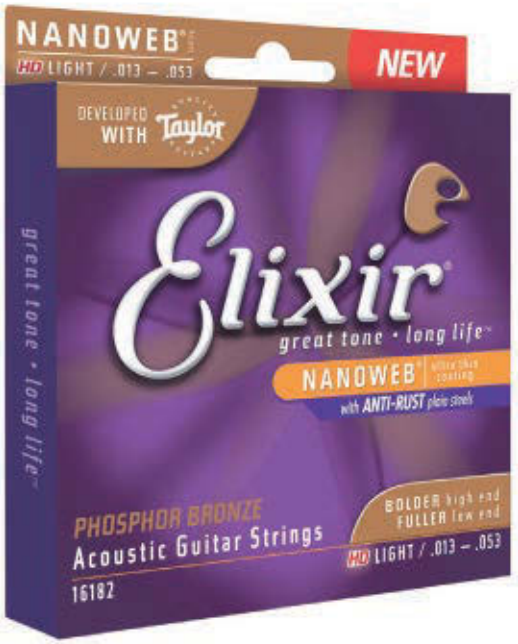
ELIXIR HD Light Strings, a new voice to love—for longer. Try a set today.

Street price: Phosphor Bronze $15.99 and 80/20 Bronze $14.99
elixirstrings.com



HD Light Phosphor Bronze with NANOWEB® Coating

HD Light 80/20 Bronze with NANOWEB® Coating

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FRACTAL AUDIO SYSTEMS

Axe-Fx II XL

Fractal's new "XL" edition takes the Axe-Fx II to new levels with expanded memory and connectivity. Keep all your favorites onboard with space for 512 each of presets and cabs (including the new UltraRes format!). Individual presets can also take advantage or expanded memory for additional "XY" switching. Connect up to two expression pedals directly to the unit, or use the new FASLINK port to connect your MFC-101 Mark III via traditional XLR.

Street price: $2,499.95
fractalaudio.com

FRACTAL AUDIO SYSTEMS HEAR SOUND CLIPS PLAY VIDEOS BUY IT NOW FIND US ON FACEBOOK

ESP GUITARS

ESP E-II Mystique

The ESP E-II Mystique is made in ESP's Japan factory, representing the new standard in ESP Guitars. It offers set-neck construction at 25.5" scale, with a mahogany body, quilted maple top, and rosewood fingerboard. Premier components include a bone nut, 24 jumbo frets, Schaller Security Lock strap buttons, Gotoh locking tuners, TonePros locking TOM bridge, and Gotoh tailpiece. Includes Seymour Duncan APH-1N (neck) and SH-4 (bridge) pickups. Hardshell case included.

Street price: $1,799.00
espguitars.com

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PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

S2 Series

The PRS S2 Series is comprised of five models: the S2 Mira, S2 Starla, S2 Singlecut, and S2 Custom 22 and 24. These models share several key features, including PRS S2 locking tuners, custom-wound pickups, PRS neck shapes, PRS S2 bridges as well as PRS fretwire, nuts, and double-action truss rods. Standing for "Stevensville 2," S2 instruments are made in Maryland and offer PRS fit, feel, and attention to detail at a more affordable pricepoint.

Street price: **Starting at $1,179.00**
prsguitars.com

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

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PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

Private Stock Alex Lifeson Thinline

"During the 2013 Rush Clockwork Angels Tour, I spent some time with a PRS Angelus Cutaway. It quickly became my pre-show warm-up guitar. I spent many hours in many hotel rooms lost in the gorgeous sound and tone of that instrument. I'm happy to announce that I have collaborated with PRS to develop a signature model based on this superlative platform. If you're like me, you won't be able to put it down." —Alex Lifeson

Street price: **$8,999.00**
prsguitars.com

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

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PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

Archon

The PRS Archon is a commanding and versatile 2-channel amp. The lead channel incorporates five gain stages before the master volume, delivering lush distortion. The clean channel provides ample headroom and rich tones that retain clarity even at high volume—an excellent platform for pedals.

Volume and tone controls for each channel. Global depth control for thunderous low end. Presence control for high-end chime. A half-power switch allows for 100 or 50 watts.

Street price: $1,899.00
prsguitars.com

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

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PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

SE Zach Myers

"I've been with PRS for 12 years. This is the best guitar I have ever played," says Zach Myers of Shinedown.

The 2014 SE Zach Myers features a chambered mahogany body with maple cap. The single f-hole provides a natural, resonant reverb, and the neck's satin finish has a very comfortable, woody, worn-in feel. Additional appointments include PRS's adjustable stoptail bridge, vintage-style tuners, and SE 245 pickups paired with dual volume tone controls and a 3-way toggle switch.

Street price: $679.00
prsguitars.com

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

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RUPPERT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Clean Boost, Classic Boost, Sonic Spark

The RMI Clean Boost combines the quality of the Basswitch IQ DI booster with a 3bd EQ voiced for Bass the way we feel an EQ should be voiced for bass.

The RMI Classic Boost is identical to the RMI Clean Boost but with a voicing tweaked to make it a perfect fit for passive JJ, P and PJ type basses.

The RMI Sonic Spark, developed in collaboration with Michael Eisenmann from AER amps, combines a complex EQ with a harmonic overtone generator and will make your bass shine.

All pedals feature Lehle True Sound switching and power technology and are manufactured in Germany.

Street price: Clean Boost: $249.99, Classic Boost: $249.99, Sonic Spark: $299.99
rmi.lu

RUPPERT MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

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D'ADDARIO

NS Artist Capo

Designed with the performing guitarist in mind, the NS Artist Capo clamps to the front of the instrument, in order to avoid obstruction of the performer's fretting hand while playing. This new capo utilizes a patented trigger geometry which reduces the force required to open and close the capo, while still applying even tension. The capo features a micrometer tension adjustment dial, which allows the guitarist to finely modify the tension of the capo.

Street price: $32.65
planetwaves.com

D'Addario PLANETWAVES

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SKB CASES

3i-4214-61 Watertight Gibson® SG Style C

SKB adds the new iSeries Watertight Indestructible Guitar case, the 3i-4214-61 Gibson® SG style guitar case. The platinum plush interior was designed to fit all Gibson and Epiphone SG® guitars, except 12-string styles. These cases are injection molded of ultra high-strength polypropylene copolymer resin with a gasketed, waterproof design, patented TSA "trigger release" latching system, comfortable, snap-down cushion grip handles, automatic ambient pressure equalization valve, secure stacking, convenient wheels, and SKB's Lifetime Warranty.

Street price: $249.99
skbcases.com

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C.F. MARTIN & CO.

D-35E Retro

Chris Martin's vision for the Retro Series is to perfectly capture the mystique and tonal emotion of priceless, pristine, and well-aged Martin guitars. With electronic imaging from a 1967 vintage D-35 "donor" guitar, the resulting acoustic as well as amplified tone is projective, balanced, and resonant. Classic and enhanced D-35 appointments include a three-piece back, black pickguard, ivoroid bindings, and a certified European spruce soundboard with thin 1/4" width bracing. The visual appeal of the original D-35 is captured and blended with a High Performance Neck® taper for easy action and enhanced playability.

Street price: $4,499.00
martinguitar.com

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C.F. MARTIN & CO.

D-28 Authentic 1937

Perhaps the most revered vintage D-28s are the ones created in 1937 with forward-shifted hand-scalloped X-bracing, an Adirondack red spruce soundboard, and a 1 3/4" neck width. This addition to the Authentic series is a recreation of the original 1937 model offered with Madagascar rosewood back and sides.

Street price: $8,499.00
martinguitar.com

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TAURUS

Dexter Octaver

The Dexter octaver enables polyphonic transposition of sound up and down an octave. Both octaves can be mixed with the dry instrument signal. Select only the upper or lower octave or both at the same time. The octaver is equipped with regulators of both octaves so you can easily shape the sound of the effect. The Dexter is powered by a high-quality 24-bit DSP, resulting in the most musical sounding octave available.

Street price: $319.00
osiamo.com/products/taurus

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BIGFOOT ENGINEERING

Thunder Pup

The Thunder Pup Overdrive pedal's unique "Big Amp/Little Amp" switch toggles between two classic British amplifier sounds: a stack with a 4x12 speaker cabinet, and an open-back 2x12 combo. The Big Amp mode delivers a big low end with a naturally compressed distortion, and the Little Amp setting has a lighter bass response with an airy upper midrange and superb note definition.

Street price: $269.00
osiamo.com/thunderpup

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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

EX-175

In continuing to pay homage to Master Luthier John D'Angelico, we present the new 2014 D'Angelico EX-175. Featuring dual Kent Armstrong humbuckers and Bigsby vibrato, this D'Angelico has enough retro-vibe for any vintage guitar fanatic. The electronics consist of two volumes, two tones, and a 3-way toggle switch. The neck is made of hard maple sides with a walnut center. The top is laminated spruce and the back is laminated flame maple. Tuning machines are chrome Grover Super Rotomatics. This guitar is available in three different finishes: cherry, natural, and black. The EX-175 includes the deluxe D'Angelico hard-shell case.

Street price: $1,579.00
dangelicoguitars.com

D'Angelico New York

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D'ANGELICO GUITARS

EX-59

Presenting the D'Angelico EX-59. In 1959, legendary luthier John D'Angelico built this magnificent hollowbody archtop guitar with P-90 pickups. We are proud to add this reproduction to our growing family of fine instruments. The beautiful sunburst laminated flame maple finish is true to the original instrument. Vintage appointments such as the chicken head pickup selector only add to the vibe of this unique D'Angelico. Grover Super Rotomatic tuners ensure this instrument will always stay in tune. The EX-59 features gold hardware, including the famous D'Angelico stair-step tailpiece. D'Angelico's distinctive headstock is well known among all of John's instruments. The 25.5" scale neck has a walnut center and mother of pearl inlays. The deluxe D'Angelico hard case is included.

Street price: **$1,499.00**
dangelicoguitars.com

D'Angelico New York

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MODTONE
Bohemian Overdrive

The ModTone Bohemian Overdrive pedal captures the true essence of classic British amplifier design. You can go from a touch of grit to a medium UK saturation setting. The Bohemian Overdrive is right at home as a main overdrive in the front end of your amp as well as authentic tube saturation when used as a solo boost. With the addition of a "+/-"switch, it allows a mild tonal cut to dial in any type of pick-up you are using. The Bohemian features a 3--knob, standard overdrive configuration consisting of Volume, Tone, and Gain. The Bohemian is also dressed with a trendy, red sparkle finish, all metal housing, aircraft quality switches, and a bright blue LED indicator light. Like all ModTone Effects pedals, it comes standard with true-bypass circuitry, 9-volt battery or power jack option, and a 5-year warranty.

Street price: $109.95
modtone-effects.com

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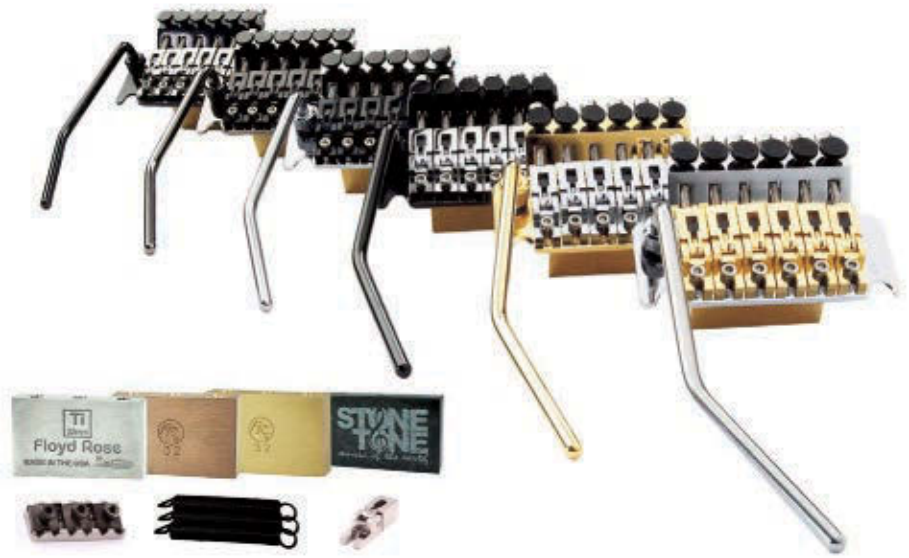
FLOYD ROSE

Floyd Rose Custom Shoppe

Following the recent launch of the new floydrose.com, Floyd Rose is unveiling an innovative new online Custom Shoppe bridge system—a way for customers to build the precise Floyd Rose bridge to suit their individual needs. Users will be able to select from our extensive catalog of parts and upgrades to create a virtually infinite combination of possible tremolo systems, which they will receive built-as-designed. Whether the player is interested in innovating a mostly titanium tremolo with a swapped tungsten block or old-style arm, building an interpretation of an early EVH design, or creating a true Frankenstein, the customer's imagination will now be the limit of their tremolo system.



Street price: **Depends on customer's choices!**
floydrose.com

FloydRose® HEAR SOUND CLIPS PLAY VIDEOS BUY IT NOW FIND US ON FACEBOOK

POWER PINS

Power Pins

Finally—an acoustic guitar pin that never needs to be removed! After a quick, easy, and completely uninvasive installation, players will find an ease of string replacement found only (until now) on electric guitars. After changing strings, you'll be surprised by the increased bridge-to-soundboard contact, amplified tone and resonance, eased string action, and bridge plate protection from string groove damage. No more need for 17th century bridge pin technology in your modern acoustic guitar!

Street price: **$49-$57**
apintl.com

POWER PINS Advanced Acoustic Guitar Stringing System HEAR SOUND CLIPS PLAY VIDEOS BUY IT NOW FIND US ON FACEBOOK

CELESTION

G12-35XC

Developed specially for Celestion's 90th Anniversary, the G12-35XC is an exceptional Limited Edition guitar speaker, hand-assembled at our facility in England. Delivering open and musical cleans without sacrificing an immensely satisfying crunch or searing, overdriven lead lines, the 35XC is made to engage your musical soul. It exhibits poise, tonal evenness, and freedom from souring colorations, as well as adding more sparkle and air to your sound.

Street price: $169.00
celestion.com

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CELESTION

A-Type

Inspired by our favourite modern American tones, the A-Type is a different kind of guitar speaker from Celestion. It still has the musical and revealing three-dimensional quality that's the heart and soul of a Celestion guitar speaker, but features a more laid-back midrange which reveals body and complexity in the upper register, accompanied by full and rounded low frequencies. It conveys a fluid, even performance with an increased headroom threshold that allows your amp's tone to shine through.

Street price: $99.00
celestion.com

HEAR SOUND CLIPS PLAY VIDEOS BUY IT NOW FIND US ON FACEBOOK

QUILTER LABORATORIES, LLC

ToneBlock 200

The Tone Block 200 delivers the most power you've ever experienced in the smallest possible package. From the pedalboard to the rack, the Tone Block delivers on the promise of lightweight, next generation Quilter tone in the most diminutive of packages.

From the Quilter proprietary direct out to the jaw-dropping tube-like tone, never before has so much clean headroom been put into such a practical application. Set it up with your pedals or your rackmount effects to achieve incredible results effortlessly.

Use it anywhere, in any setting. It is everything you love about tube tone without the tradeoffs or hassles. Plug it in there in the studio through the direct out to record late at night. Then crank it into your favorite cabinets at the gig. All the while without giving up on your tone, you're way through the front end you already love. Or just bring it along as a backup. Either way, there is no end to the ways the Tone Block has your back at every gig, every night, any place on the face of the earth.

Street price: $399
quilterlabs.com

Quilter Guitar Amplifiers

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EARTHQUAKER DEVICES
Pitch Bay

The Pitch Bay is a three-part polyphonic harmonizer and distortion generator in one compact enclosure. It features two voices of adjustable polyphonic pitch shifting, one above the root and one below. Each voice can be adjusted by stepped semitones, from 1 semitone to 12 semitones (one full octave) above and below the root. Each voice (Pitch up, Pitch down, and Root) has an adjustable mix control so they can be blended, cut or boosted to your heart's desire. The Pitch Bay also features an adjustable input gain that goes from clean to heavily distorted to unleash your inner hesher. This device has an all-analog adjustable gain preamp, all-analog signal path for the root, all-digital pitch shifting engine, and true-bypass switching for activation. Each Pitch Bay is made one at a time by hand in the private beach front resort sector of Akron, Ohio.

Street price: $225
earthquakerdevices.com

EarthQuaker Devices

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3RD POWER AMPS

Dream Solo Series

3rd Power is all about cutting-edge retro designs. Our 20-watt DREAM SOLO tube amps are single-channel versions of our popular Dream Series amps used by pros. Each distinct model delivers that 3rd Power refined sound—all in a lower wattage, compact package.

Features include handwired construction, passive loop and our patent-applied-for HybridMASTER™ volume management technology.

Take a closer look—you'll be surprised at how much the Dream Solo Series has to offer.

Street price: **Starting at $1,295**
3rdpower.com

3RD POWER HEAR SOUND CLIPS PLAY VIDEOS BUY IT NOW FIND US ON FACEBOOK

3RD POWER AMPS

Dream Series

3rd Power is all about cutting-edge retro designs. Our 40-watt DREAM SERIES handwired amplifiers give you the tone and functionality of two iconic amps in one.

The AMERICAN DREAM™ is inspired by our favorite Fullerton, California, amps of the 1960s.

The British Dream™ is inspired by our favorite UK amplifiers of the late '50s and '60s.

With two amps in one, you'll be surprised at how much the Dream Series has to offer.

Street price: **$2,499**
3rdpower.com

3RD POWER HEAR SOUND CLIPS PLAY VIDEOS BUY IT NOW FIND US ON FACEBOOK

FREAKING SICK
30 Volt Overdrive

Two years of R&D has produced what F.S.E. customers are calling "the holy grail of overdrives." Pete Thorn says "it responds just like the overdrive channel of a great amp." Yes, the 30 Volt Overdrive is a freaking sick pedal—what we like to call a half-stack in a box. Harmonics just leap out from it.

The 30 Volt Overdrive offers incredible flexibility with three voltage positions, vintage/modern modes, and a presence control.

You MUST hear the 30 Volt Overdrive in person. YOU WILL WANT ONE.

Specifications:

- Bass, Treble, Presence, Output, and Drive controls
- Vintage/Modern Switch
- Voltage selector (3,15, and 30v): controls headroom and dynamic response
- Relay-based true-bypass with soft-touch footswitch
- Full-size 24 mm potentiometers and Mil-spec resistors
- Operates on industry standard 9VDC power supply

Street price: $299 with trade-in of any pedal, working or not.
Retail price: $345
freakingsick.com

HEAR SOUND CLIPS PLAY VIDEOS BUY IT NOW FIND US ON FACEBOOK

MOD KITS DIY
The Wahtz

The Wahtz Wah Pedal Kit produces the classic Wah tone you've come to expect with a hint of extra bite and growl. True-bypass switching ensures no loss of signal when the Wah effect is not engaged, and the long-life potentiometer manufactured specifically for use in wah pedals is included to provide years of smooth, quiet operation. Point-to-point construction allows advanced kit builders to easily experiment with modifications to further tailor the tone to more individual tastes.

Street price: $99.95
modkitzdiy.com

MOD™

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MXR
Uni-Vibe

The Uni-Vibe® Chorus/Vibrato is one of the most iconic effects in music history. Since the late '60s, groundbreaking guitar players have used it to expand the tonal and textural palette of the electric guitar.

The MXR team remastered the classic effect for modern players. The MXR Chorus/Vibrato delivers the same chewy, Leslie-sounding goodness with a smaller footprint.

With its simple three-knob interface, you can dial up the iconic effect to your taste in short order. First, use the VIBE switch to select either Chorus Mode—dry signal mixed with pitch-shifted signal—or Vibrato Mode—only pitch-shifted signal. Then, use the LEVEL control to set the effect volume, the SPEED control to set the sweep rate, and the DEPTH control to set overall intensity.

The MXR Uni-Vibe Chorus/Vibrato comes in a Phase 90-sized housing—a fraction of the size and weight of the original Uni-Vibe pedal—and features true-bypass switching.

Street price: $129.99
jimdunlop.com

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DECIBEL 11

Switch Dr. MIDI Controller Loop Switcher

The new Decibel Eleven Switch Dr.™ is a versatile and easy to program master controller that combines fully programmable MIDI control, true-bypass audio effects loops, and amp-channel switching capabilities.

128 presets capable of sending:

- Up to 3 MIDI program changes on 3 MIDI channels
- Up to 8 MIDI continuous controller On/Off messages on 2 MIDI channels
- Up to 4 MIDI Note-On messages for triggering samplers
- Expression Pedal MIDI Continuous Controller Data
  * Up to four true-bypass pedal effects loops.
  * Up to three switch control functions for amp channel switching.
  * Optional analog discrete Class A input buffer— for retaining top end sparkle and preventing pickup loading.
  * Direct mode for instant access to individual switches
  * External expression pedal input.
  * Optional "global" default preset can be accessed from any bank at any time.
  * Presets can be recalled remotely by MIDI for syncing multiple switchers/controllers.

Street price: $299
decibel11.com

decibel eleven

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PRO CO
Fat Rat

Building off the popularity and foundation of the original RAT Pedals, this new model is entirely built in the United States and features complete tonal flexibility through a choice of original or MOSFET circuits.

The MOSFET clipping section in the new pedal provides a subtle smoothing in the upper mids and a more amp-like tone throughout the range of the RAT, without loss of the basic feel of the classic pedal. The new RAT Pedal also features a bass enhancement that increases the bass response, which is perfect for bassists and guitar players who tune down their instruments. The new pedal will now run on nine- to 18-volts of DC power, for users looking for the best headroom and audio fidelity. Lastly, the new RAT also includes a socketed op-amp, which allows users to easily change between the stock OP07DP and other popular chip.

Street price: $299
ratdistortion.com

RAT

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MANNMADE USA

HARDTAIL BRIDGES

Direct replacements for Fender style® Hardtail Bridge Designed to improve tone and sustain, while enhancing the look and feel of your guitar.

Bridge plate and Saddles are precision machined, made in the USA.

Available in Nickel, Nickel Hybrid, Gold Hybrid & Gold finishes.

Models (shown from left to right) 2200, 2210, 2220, 2230

Street price: **Starting at $75**
mannmadeusa.com

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ANALOG ALIEN

Alien-Bass-Station (ABS)

The Alien-Bass-Station, or ABS for short, is a multi-effects pedal that we designed specifically for bass players who are looking to shape and control their sound in both live and studio situations. This unique one-of-a-kind pedal combines three essential effects that all bass players should have: "Limiter/Compressor," "Amp Generator," and "Gamma Fuzz."

The ABS is an essential tool for any bass player to have, while at the same time it can be a guitar player's secret weapon. Each Alien-Bass-Station comes with its own custom cooler bag and external power supply.

Street price: **$399**
analogalien.com

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COLLINGS
I-35 LC

The I-35 LC is the result of a custom laminate construction technique that Bill Collings and his R&D team developed in pursuit of the best tonal qualities of vintage semi-hollow guitar design. When crafting instruments intended to be amplified at higher volumes, the resonant qualities of the guitar need a high degree of focus to achieve some of the classic semi-hollow guitar tones. The I-35 LC is the first of a line of laminate instruments designed to respond acoustically in perfect harmony with their electronics. Individually crafted in Austin, Texas, the I-35 LC features a custom laminate maple top, sides and back and an all-mahogany neck. Like all Collings instruments, the I-35 LC is voiced for superior tone and response and is among the most articulate and versatile electric models in their lineup.

Street price: **$4,050.00**
collingsguitars.com

Collings GUITARS
AUSTIN TEXAS

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TECH 21 NYC
Fly Rig 5

With the functionality of a full pedalboard, the Fly Rig 5 is a single, simple solution to getting rich, expressive combinations you can use for any gig—around the corner or across the globe, whether the backline is first-class or jump seat. Less than 12" long, weighing 18.5 oz., the Fly Rig 5 crams five must-have pedals into one sleek, rugged metal, pro unit that easily fits into your guitar case.

All-analog SansAmp. Dial-in your favorite tube amp sounds, from lush clean tones to warm break-up to snarling grind.

Reverb. Creates rich ambiance of a vintage spring reverb without clattery pings or other artifacts.

Plexi. Produces legendary muscular crunch, detailed mids, mule-kick low end.

Hot. Up to 21 dB of pre-amp gain. Works independently to boost other functions.

DLA. Emulates a vintage tape echo, with tap-tempo and adjustable tape drift-style modulation.

The Fly Rig 5 has everything you need and nothing you don't. Just grab and go.

Manufactured in U.S.A.

Street price: $249
tech21nyc.com

TECH 21
DESIGNED AND MANUFACTURED IN THE USA

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VISUAL SOUND

H2O

The new Visual Sound V3H2O has all the classic chorus and echo tones from its storied past, yet the capability to give the user the otherworldly tones of what is yet to come. To give the Chorus circuit more versatility, knobs for chorus/vibrato, and tone, along with switches for intensity and detuning effects have been added to give the user the ability to dial in everything from a light shimmer to Leslie tones, or true pitch vibrato to pulsating out-of-this-world effects. The Echo side keeps its stellar warmth, yet now has the trance-inducing ability to go into controlled oscillation, all with the smooth yet crunchy repeats that make your guitar tone stand out. The new V3H2O also has the revolutionary ability to select between true-bypass or buffered-bypass with footswitches that look traditional yet utilize gold-plated relays to create a switching circuit that will last forever. The V3H2O carries Visual Sound's Lifetime Warranty.

Street price: $179
visualsound.net

Visual Sound
real tone for real people

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VISUAL SOUND

VS-XO

The VS-XO Premium Dual Overdrive is the culmination of Visual Sound's almost 20 years of first-class pedal design. The right channel has the silky yet biting attack that cuts through any mix, while the left channel features flat mids that keep its overdrive flavor more transparent and amp-like in nature. In addition to Drive, Tone, and Volume, the right side has a 3-way Clipping switch, a 3-way Bass switch, and a Clean Mix knob to make dialing a great tone a breeze, while the left channel features Drive, Tone, and Volume knobs, along with a highly effective Bass knob that can just as successfully cut or fortify bass response. Under the hood, the VS-XO has the revolutionary ability to select between true-bypass or buffered-bypass with footswitches that look traditional yet utilize gold-plated relays to create a switching circuit that will last forever. The VS-XO carries Visual Sound's Lifetime Warranty.

Street price: $179
visualsound.net

Visual Sound
real tone for real people

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DIGITAL AUDIO LABS

Stompblox

Stompblox pedalboards are designed to connect to each other, making more room for pedals as necessary. Connect them two deep and as many wide as you can fit on stage. Hand-tightening thumbscrews are attached to the board, making it easy to connect and disconnect without losing important parts. Because of the unique way the parts connect, Stompblox can be designed into configurations to fit your unique style. Each Stompblox includes a free modular bag.

Street price: $69
stompblox.com

STOMP BLOX www.stompblox.com DIGITAL AUDIO LABS

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SPLAWN GUITARS

SS1

Splawn Guitars introduces the SS1 and SS2 guitar line. Made in the USA with many custom options available. The SS1 has that hot-rodded, double cut-away vibe that's been popular for decades. The SS2 is more modern with deeper cut-aways and a contoured heel. Many tone woods, neck styles, and finshes to choose from. Prices start at $1,650.00 with a hardshell case.

Street price: Prices start at $1,650.00 with case
splawnguitars.com

Splawn AMPLIFICATION

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AXETRACK
"PRO" Isolation Cabinet

The AxeTrak® "PRO" is the next generation Isolation cabinet from AxeTrak®. This small Baltic Birch enclosure is capable of capturing the true mic'd sound of any electric guitar and amplifier. The AxeTrak® "PRO" features the brand new AxeTrak® "Rapture" speaker with true guitar voicing and extended frequency range. Other features include 100-degrees of microphone rotation, passive bass and treble boost switches, a deep port, signal strength LED, and fuse protection. This unit will handle roughly 75 watts RMS and is capable of producing pristine clean tones, heavy tuned-down overdriven tones, and everything in between. The audible sound radiating from the AxeTrak® "PRO" is that of a whisper, while the recorded sound coming from the internally mounted custom-designed cardioid dynamic microphone is well balanced, full-bodied, and very articulate. Unlike other isolation cabinets, this unit is lightweight, portable, and easy to move around. It weighs just 20 pounds.

Street price: **$459 Factory Direct**
axetrack.com

AXETRAK®

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DLS EFFECTS

Reckless Driver Overdrive/Distortion

NEW! DLS Effects Reckless Driver Distortion/ Overdrive is an Overdrive when you want it, and a Reckless Distortion when you need it! By using the clean Mix and Gain controls, you can set your tone clean with full warm tube sound, or Overdriven tones, or heavy biting "Reckless" distortion for leads, and anything in between! An Attack switch changes the edge and brightness. Experience our extra-wide dynamic Bass and Treble controls, plus separate Normal and Boost Channels!

Street price: $179
dlseffects.com

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NORDSTRAND

Dual Blade Neo

"It's long been a goal of mine to offer a 'one size fits all' pickup that delivers the rich, complex full-bodied tone that we are known for," says company owner Carey Nordstrand. These pickups deliver on this promise and also incorporate a more modern flavor gleaned from the combination of steel blades and neo magnets. The pickups are also designed to be split to single-coil for a great vintage inspired J bass tone.

Street price: $117.00
nordstrandpickups.com

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BIGROCK ENGINEERING
SNAPZ™ BRIDGE PIN PULLER

In the tradition of offering simple and unique tools and accessories for guitars, BIGROCK ENGINEERING presents the SNAPZ™ acoustic guitar bridge pin puller to assist in extracting stuck pins.

SNAPZ™ offers features that distinguish it from all other tools currently available for acoustic guitar bridge pin removal. In addition to its clean ergonomic design, the SNAPZ™ offers the following:

- Locks on pin head, will not damage bridge or pins.
- Made from engineered plastic.
- No popping and fly away lost pins.
- Simple operation—mount on pin, slide lock and pull.

SNAPZ™ is made in the USA—MSRP is $9.95 USD

Distributed By ALLPARTS-AP INTERNATIONAL-TONE KING-DAVITT & HANSER

Street price: $7.49
f1pick.com

BIGROCK ENGINEERING
GUITAR ACCESSORIES

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REVEREND GUITARS

Pete Anderson HB Custom

The popular PA-1 platform now has Classic H humbuckers, for a smooth, thick tone! Reverend has teamed up with country/roots-rock guitar legend and Grammy-winning artist/producer Pete Anderson to design this customized hollowbody. Pete wanted a classic hollow sound and look, but with the ability to play at higher volumes without uncontrollable feedback. So we developed the innovative Uni-Brace that not only addresses feedback, but also enhances sustain, durability, and clarity. Unique features include: bushing mounted bridge, "R" embossed knobs, back sprayed/logoed pickguard, and 15th fret neck/body joint for better high fret access.

Street price: $1,679
reverendguitars.com

REVEREND

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WALRUS AUDIO

Descent Reverb

The Descent, a fresh take on recent developments in the sound of reverb, employs dark tones that emulate cavernous depths. Full of vintage Hall Reverb settings to the conceptual Reverse and Shimmer Reverbs, and the additional Dry Signal, +1 and -1 controls allow the user to fully dial in exact amounts of unaffected signal, one octave up and one octave down into the reverb's Wet Mix.

Street price: $299
walrusaudio.com

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VALOY GUITARS

El Hacha Series

Valoy Handcrafted Custom Guitars

Our unique design and attention to detail are committed to enrich the instrument's sound, versatility, and beauty.

We believe in the continuous refinement of our one-of-a-kind instruments, and we are proud to introduce the new "El Hacha" Series.

Give our guitars a look—we think you'll be glad that you did!

Body shape, headstock, and Valoy logo are copyrighted by Valoy Guitars.

Body, Center Block and Neck: Mahogany
Top, Back and Headstock: 5 A Flame Maple
Binding: One-ply
Fingerboard: Ebony
Scale Length: 25-5"
Number of Frets: 22
Inlays: Mother of Pearl split-blocks
Color/Finishing: Satin / Sunburst
Plating Finish: Gold
Bridge: Ghost Resomax / Piezo
Knobs: Gold Speed
Tuners: Gotoh Keystone
Neck Pickup: Bare Knuckle Blackdog Tyger humbucker
Bridge Pickup: Seymour Duncan Distortion humbucker
Controls: One volume, push/pull, 3-way switch
Piezo Control switch: 3-way

Street price: **$5,900**
valoyguitars.com

Valoy USA GUITARS

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CARR AMPS

Skylark

The Carr Skylark is the ultimate low-power, American-inspired amplifier!

It steals the ball from classic home/student '60s American amps such as the Harvard, and adds Muscle Carr musicality with real features, lasting design aesthetics, and your "I can't stop playing" smile.

The Skylark has a built-in attenuator so you can play late night and get great grind at any volume.

Street price: $2,390
carramps.com

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GREER AMPS

LIGHTSPEED ORGANIC OVERDRIVE

The Lightspeed Organic Overdrive is a new take on overdrive. Greer Amplification has designed a circuit that is simple, but very effective. Utilizing an input structure that has the natural feel of a warm tube amp, this pedal blends with your rig. The Lightspeed is the answer to the age-old search for natural, harmonically rich, true overdrive. Think you've heard it all before? Think again. The Lightspeed will be your new go-to overdrive!

Street price: $190
greeramps.com

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MCPHERSON GUITARS

Kevin Michael Carbon Fiber Guitar

Kevin Michael™ is a new line of carbon fiber guitars from the innovative luthiers at McPherson Guitars®.

Matt McPherson, Founder and Designer of McPherson Guitars®, teamed up with former aerospace engineer and founder of Composite Acoustics®, Ellis Seal, to improve the design and playability of carbon fiber guitars.

This introductory Travel Guitar is optimized for performance and reliability. It incorporates some of the signature design features of a McPherson Guitar®, such as the off-set soundhole and the cantilevered neck, with new proprietary carbon fiber materials and brace construction. Despite being ultra lightweight, the Kevin Michael™ Travel Guitar is incredibly stable and resistant to the elements. It exudes excellent strength, optimum tone and maintains accurate intonation up and down the neck with minimal tuning.

Kevin Michael™ Carbon Fiber Guitars are made in the U.S.A. Go to www.mcphersonguitars.com to find a retailer near you.

Street price: $2,400
mcphersonguitars.com/kevinmichael/

Kevin Michael

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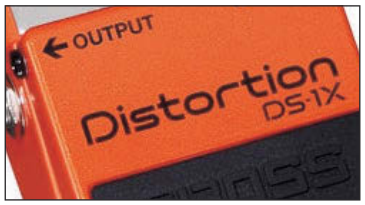
WISH YOU'D BEEN AT NAMM?

GUITARS&GEAR

is bringing a taste of NAMM to you!
Here are full demos of **24** cool
products from the show.

FENDER
American Deluxe Strat Plus



BOSS
DS-1X

BOSS
OD-1X

GIBSON
Hummingbird Quilt

UNIVERSAL AUDIO
Apollo Twin Audio Interface

PRS GUITARS
S2 Singlecut

GATOR CASES
Journeyman Series

ELECTRO-HARMONIX
Next Step Slammi

BOSS
ME-80 Multi-effects

ELECTRO-HARMONIX
Soul Food

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J-29 Acoustic

TWO NOTES
Torpedo Reload

FISHMAN
Fluence Pickups

FENDER

American Deluxe Strat Plus

The FENDER® American Deluxe Strat® Plus makes it easier than ever to mod the sound of your Strat to suit any musical situation. It's like having three guitars in one. You get everything you know and love about the Stratocaster®, plus a set of three "personality" cards that re-wire your guitar with specialized pickup and circuitry modifications. Just pop open the easy-access compartment on the back of the Strat®, put in your personality card of choice, and rock out. With three distinct voices, plus N3 Noiseless™ pickups for sweet tone and a compound-radius fretboard for incredible playability, you'll be amazingly well-equipped for any gig with the American Deluxe Strat Plus.

MSRP: **$2,099.99**

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Fender®

BOSS
DS-1X

Combining over 35 years of pedal design, the DS-1X takes BOSS's famous distortion sound into a new era of guitar playing. The DS-1X features BOSS's innovative Multi-Dimensional Processing technology, which allows it to dynamically adapt to any register you play in. We've played with all of BOSS's MDP pedals here at Sweetwater, and we can assure you, these pedals are awesome! And thanks to the DS-1X's dual tone knobs, not only do you get clear and full-sounding distortion all across the fretboard, you get the control you need to make it your own.

MSRP: **$243.50**

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BOSS®

BOSS
OD-1x

Taking full advantage of BOSS's Multi-Dimensional Processing, the OD-1X reinvents a classic overdrive stompbox in a way any guitarist will appreciate. Thanks to powerful real-time processing, the OD-1X lets you fly from the lowest drop-tuned open string to the highest fret experiencing the smoothest, most natural-sounding overdrive you've heard. This pedal responds to your pick attack just like an ultra-responsive tube amp. We've played with all of BOSS's MDP pedals here at Sweetwater, and we can assure you, these pedals are awesome! No matter the pickup or the register, this awesome BOSS OD-1X overdrive pedal delivers!

MSRP: **$243.50**

LEARN MORE

BOSS®

GIBSON ACOUSTIC
Hummingbird Quilt

Gibson's Hummingbird has been one of their most recognized - and played - acoustic guitars for over 50 years. For 2014 the Hummingbird Quilt acoustic-electric guitar takes the classic square-shoulder dreadnought design and accentuates it with gorgeous quilted maple back and sides. With the hand-rubbed nitro finish, the effect is amazingly holographic and dimensional. And you'll find everything else you'd expect on a Hummingbird, from the tone-enhancing scalloped X-bracing to the Baggs Element pickup for natural plugged-in sound.

MSRP: **$4,771.00**

LEARN MORE

Gibson Acoustic

UNIVERSAL AUDIO

Apollo Twin Audio interface

With the Universal Audio Apollo Twin on your desktop, you've got much more than a world-class audio interface. Built-in UAD processing lets you take advantage of the rich, warm, analog sound of UAD Powered Plug-ins during mixdown — and even in real time during tracking. And speaking of tracking, the Apollo Twin's astounding Unison mic preamp technology lets you re-create the sound of classic mic preamps in a way that software processing simply can't match. Many Sweetwater employees can't go back to traditional plug-ins after trying UAD — you may feel the same way once you hear your first project created with the Universal Audio Apollo Twin.

MSRP: **$1,129.00**

LEARN MORE

UNIVERSAL AUDIO

PRS GUITARS
S2 Singlecut

The PRS S2 Singlecut solidbody electric guitar brings a classic body style to the already impressive S2 line of guitars. It's an incredibly comfortable guitar to wear and play over long gigs and recording sessions, thanks to its asymmetric beveled, bookmatched, figured maple top. And guitarists at Sweetwater really dig the PRS S2 #7 neck and bridge humbuckers, which serve up vintage flavors with plenty of clarity and articulation. Basically, if you're after monster tone, epic sustain, and eminent playability, your expectations will be exceeded with the PRS S2 Singlecut.

MSRP: **$1,399.99**

LEARN MORE

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

GATOR CASES
Journeyman Series

Moving away from the traditional 'black' exterior, the Journeyman series provides a fresh look with its pebble weaved burlap wrapping and espresso brown trim. Antique brass hardware give each Journeyman case a classic look. A beautiful royal blue crushed velvet lines the interior and provides a soft cushioning for your instrument. An internal accessory storage compartment is perfect for straps, strings, capo, and related accessories. Each Journeyman case is constructed of thick plywood.

The Journeyman series includes (9) models designed to fit standard electrics, dreadnaught acoustic, resonators, banjos, bass guitars, mandolins, and Soprano, Concert and Tenor style Ukuleles.

MSRP: **Starting at $189.00**

LEARN MORE

ELECTRO-HARMONIX

Next Step Slammi

Slammi revolutionizes foot-controlled pitch shifting with a powerful new algorithm that yields tremendous improvements in tone.

Three-octave polyphonic dive bombs, smooth as silk pitch shifting, fixed interval harmonies and bends plus much more… with the Slammi's precise control and glitch-free operation the only limit is your imagination.

MSRP: **$191.66**

LEARN MORE

electro-harmonix

BOSS
ME-80 Multi-effects

Get an entire guitar rig and pedalboard in one unit with the BOSS ME-80 Guitar Multi-effects Processor. Utilizing the technology from the GT-100 and BOSS's MDP effects, the ME-80 delivers killer sounds. A COSM preamp section helps you build great amplifier tones, and eight footswitches give you access to compression, distortion, modulation, delay effects, and more. Each effects section uses dedicated knobs for each parameter, letting you dial in sounds quickly and intuitively. Harness the power of an entire store's worth of BOSS pedals with the BOSS ME-80 Guitar Multi-effects Processor!

MSRP: **$418.50**

LEARN MORE

BOSS®

ELECTRO-HARMONIX
Soul Food

Tone aficionados kept telling EHX's Mike Matthews about a pedal that had achieved a lot of buzz because it was only obtainable at an exorbitant price. That pedal was the KLON CENTAUR.

A believer in bringing great tools to starving musicians, Mike tasked his trusty team to create an affordable alternative, and that is how the SOUL FOOD was cooked up.

The SOUL FOOD delivers transparent overdrive with great touch and response. Its circuitry features boosted power rails to provide abundant headroom and increased definition. Best of all, you don't have to be a rock star to own one!

MSRP: **$83.74**

LEARN MORE

electro-harmonix

TC-HELICON
VoiceLive 3

Previous incarnations of the VoiceLive series provided singers with a vehicle for enhancing their onstage performance by providing harmonies and effects that auto-track based on the chords being played. Whether solo or backed by a band, the VoiceLive opened up the creative possibilities of live performance. Now with the VoiceLive 3, TC-Helicon is upping the ante yet again, adding tons of new features to an already impressive system, making this version the ultimate performance tool.

MSRP: **$1,099.00**

LEARN MORE

TC-HELICON

LINE 6
AMPLIFi 150-watt Combo

The days of needing multiple pieces of gear to jam out with are gone. No longer do you need a separate stereo and amp to play along with your favorite songs. The Line 6 AMPLIFi 150 is your one-stop solution. An innovative 5-speaker design delivers big guitar tones and high-quality Bluetooth audio playback. On top of that, they also created an iOS app that lets you control every aspect of the amp with a swipe of your finger. Just plug in your guitar and start rocking out!

MSRP: **$699.99**

LEARN MORE

ORANGE
OB1K

Orange has a new 1,000-watt OB1-K bass amp, and wow - it's a beast! The OB1-K splits your bass signal along two paths, which you blend together to taste. The first path produces tight, clean, rock solid bass. The second path has two controllable gain stages. Between the two you can go from pristine clean to roaring mean!

Orange OB1-K Bass Amplifier Features:
Rackmount 1,000W solid state bass amp
Dual signal paths give you two distinct bass voices to blend together
First signal path is designed for clean, tight, powerful bass tone
Second signal path has two controllable gain stages for adding upper harmonics and distortion
Active 3-band EQ for tone shaping

MSRP: $2,649.00

LEARN MORE

ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

TAYLOR
814CE Acoustic

Taylor's 814ce 2014 1st Edition is an excellent choice if you're looking for a traditionally voiced, full-sounding acoustic-electric guitar with tasteful appointments. With a 814ce, you get the bold tone you expect from a guitar with back and sides made of genuine Indian rosewood, plus the balanced mids and shimmering highs of a choice Sitka spruce top. Even unplugged, the 814ce gives you a surprising amount of natural projection, and thanks to its onboard Taylor Expression System 2 electronics, it also sounds fantastic when you plug in. Take it from Sweetwater - you'll love the Taylor 814ce 2014 1st Edition.

MSRP: **$4,378.00**

LEARN MORE

VISUAL SOUND
V3 H20

The Visual Sound V3 Series H2O is a killer redesign of one of the best-sounding chorus/delay pedals ever made. H2O delivers all the classic tones, plus an entirely new universe of sonic possibilities. The chassis and footswitches have been updated to make the V3 H2O more roadworthy and pedal board compatible. Controls for chorus/vibrato and tone, along with detune switches give you tremendous versatility. The echo shimmers in gorgeous liquid warmth, and now has the ability to go into controlled oscillation. Take it from Sweetwater, the V3 H2O sounds amazing, and definitely belongs on your pedalboard.

MSRP: **$265.19**

LEARN MORE

MUSIC MAN
John Petrucci Majesty Guitar

Never one to rest on their laurels, Music Man and Dream Theater guitarist John Petrucci once again bring a touch of evolution to the guitar world with the Music Man John Petrucci Majesty 6-string solidbody electric guitar. The sleek, new body style utilizes a neck-through design to give you huge sustain and killer tone. Couple that with premium tonewoods, DiMarzio Illuminator pickups, a piezo tremolo, and custom switching, and you have a guitar that's ready to rock any stage. The Music Man John Petrucci Majesty 6-string is the evolution of a long line of shred machines from this prolific artist and guitar company. Call your Sweetwater Sales Engineer to learn more about this amazing instrument.

MSRP: **$3,900.99**

LEARN MORE

ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN

TOONTRACK
EZ Mix 2 Metal Bundle

A Fast Way to Create Hard-hitting Metal Mixes
Toontrack created the EZmix 2 Metal Bundle native mixing plug-in bundle to help you produce pro-sounding metal mixes, quickly and easily. You've already heard the acclaim over Toontrack's EZmix 2 mixing plug-in - it lets you pull up a custom processing chain that's optimized for whatever instrument you tell it to process. When you factor in the six preset expansion libraries included in this bundle - created by the hardest-hitting heavy metal producers and engineers in the world - you've got all the tools you need to produce face-melting metal tracks with the Toontrack EZmix 2 Metal Bundle native plug-in.

MSRP: **$299.99**

LEARN MORE

TOONTRACK

DUNLOP MXR
M68 Uni-Vibe

Add the unmistakable sound of the classic Uni-Vibe effect to your pedalboard with the MXR Uni-Vibe Chorus/Vibrato pedal. It's one of the most recognizable electric guitar effects ever, with a warm, undulating tone that's incredibly addictive to play through. And because you're unlikely to find an original Uni-Vibe in working condition for a reasonable price at Sweetwater or anywhere else, MXR has remastered this iconic effect to bring it to a whole new generation of sonically-adventurous guitarists. Plug the MXR Uni-Vibe Chorus/Vibrato into a tube amp set to its breakup point, and you've got tone that'll make anyone take notice.

MSRP: **$185.70**

LEARN MORE

PAUL REED SMITH
Archon Amplifier

The commanding PRS Archon tube guitar amplifier head gets its name from the ancient Greek word for lord or ruler, and it more than lives up to its lofty title! Thanks to its unique preamp design, which utilizes five cascading gain stages and six 12AX7 preamp tubes, the Archon's lead channel gives you a lush and creamy distortion unlike any amplifier we've had the pleasure of carrying at Sweetwater. And when you want to play clean, you'll discover a rich and flattering clean channel onboard that offers all of the headroom you or your pedalboard could ask for.

MSRP: **$2,299.00**

LEARN MORE

PRS PAUL REED SMITH GUITARS

CORDOBA GUITARS

C10S Crossover Nylon String

Enjoy rich tones and exquisite craftsmanship with the Cordoba C10! The Cordoba C10 is a work of art, and an excellent value in a nylon-string acoustic guitar. The handmade C10 sports Indian rosewood back and sides with a European spruce top, for rich tones with a lively presence. And the solid African mahogany neck provides excellent sustain and detail. No matter what your experience level, you'll love the attention to detail and excellent playability of the C10. And with the gloss polyurethane finish, Indian rosewood binding, and a hand-inlayed Mother-of-Pearl "Esteso" rosette, the C10 looks as good as it plays. Right down to the gold floral tuners and red purfling, every detail of the C10 makes it a guitar you'll want to keep for a lifetime. For a remarkably beautiful guitar that performs as good as it looks, get the Cordoba C10.

MSRP: **$1,305.00**

LEARN MORE

Cordoba

PRO CO
Fat Rat

The iconic Rat has had an overhaul, and here at Sweetwater, we're very excited! Pro Co's new US-made Fat Rat distortion pedal gives you a choice between the original or a new MOSFET clipping circuit, which delivers a smoother upper midrange for a more amp-like tone - without losing that classic, inimitable Rat feel. Also onboard is selectable bass enhancement that increases your low end response - perfect for bassists and down-tuned guitarists. Fat Rat now runs on 9-18 volts, juicing your headroom and fidelity, and sports a socketed op-amp, which lets you easily change between popular chips for even more tonal dexterity.

MSRP: **$300.00**

LEARN MORE

RAT

GIBSON ACOUSTIC
J-29 Acoustic

Full-bodied, loud, and extremely easy to play, the Gibson Acoustic J-29 Rosewood acoustic-electric guitar may just be one of the most satisfying guitars to arrive at Sweetwater in 2014. With its slightly shorter scale neck and round-shoulder body, you'll find that the J-29 sits comfortably in your lap and that fretting in any position is remarkably comfortable. Of course, there's the timeless sound you'll only get from rosewood topped in Sitka spruce, but you can also look forward to amazing sound when you play plugged in, thanks to the onboard LR Baggs Element electronics. Live onstage or in the comfort of your studio, you'll enjoy every moment you spend playing a Gibson Acoustic J-29 acoustic-electric guitar.

MSRP: **$2,862.00**

LEARN MORE

Gibson Acoustic

TWO NOTES
Torpedo Reload

Two Notes' Torpedo Reload is your one-stop high-end device for quiet/silent playing and re-amping. A power attenuator, multi-impedance loadbox, DI, and re-amping box all in one, Torpedo Reload does it all - and quite well, we might add. Take it from Sweetwater, this is essential kit for a proper guitarist's studio. It's all about tone, and you may have used attenuators that have disappointed you in the past. Torpedo Reload's Reactive-Active technology presents your amp with a consistent speaker impedance, for glorious, full, transparent sound - no matter how much attenuation you've dialed up. Torpedo Reload comes with 24 Wall of Sound cabinets, and others are available for purchase directly from within the interface.

MSRP: **$995.00**

LEARN MORE

Two notes
AUDIO ENGINEERING

FISHMAN
Fluence Pickups

Fishman's Fluence pickups don't use wound coils, they use printed layers that work in the same fashion, positioned around magnets. The result is a sonically "ideal" pickup, with no noise or hum problems. Then, using their years of experience shaping the sound of acoustic guitar pickups, Fishman applies a preamp that recreates the signature of whatever vintage or modern pickup they want — you can even switch sonic profiles for a pickup on the fly to have multiple sounds in the same guitar.

MSRP: **TBD**

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FISHMAN®

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Ed Cherney
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Eric Clapton, Bob Seger, Iggy Pop

Keith Olsen
Producer/Engineer
Fleetwood Mac, REO Speedwagon

Richard Chycki
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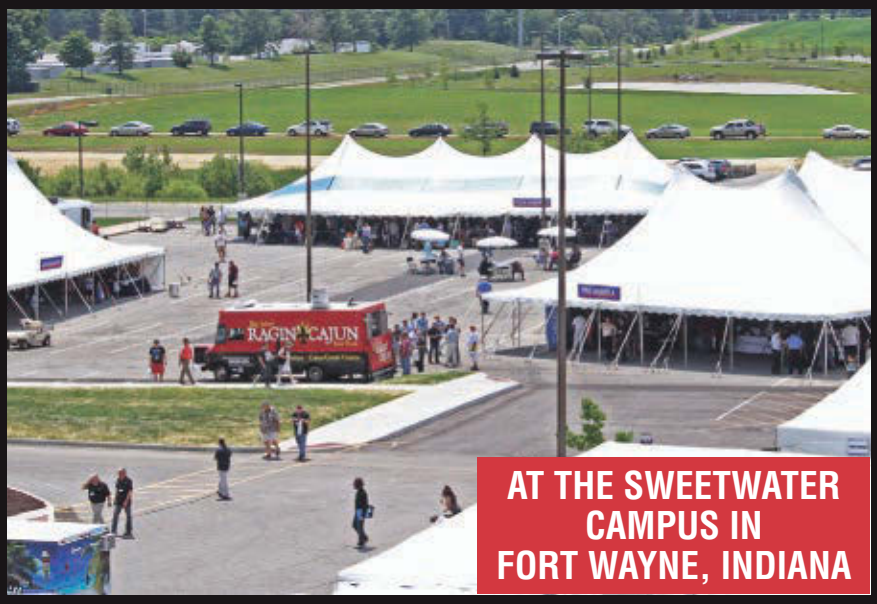

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